

AUGUSTINE AND THE DIALOGUE

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Erik Kenyon

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Erik Kenyon, Ph. D.

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One cannot understand the literary form of a dialogue without understanding its philosophical project and *vice versa*. This dissertation seeks to establish how Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues work as dialogues. Each of these works, *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita* and *De ordine*, pursues two streams of inquiry: one dialectical, one self-reflexive. The first uses aporetic debates to identify problems with individuals' current beliefs. The second reflects on the act of debate as an instance of rational activity and through this draws attention to features of human rationality. The goal of all this is to change how the inquirer thinks about himself, to bring him to see some final theory as plausible (*probabile*). We find all the elements of this method in earlier authors: *aporia* in Plato, self-reflection in Plotinus, plausible conclusions in Cicero. But in Augustine these are fused into a system, one which structures all seven of his dialogues. This study situates Augustine against this philosophical tradition and provides a fresh start for future work on his texts. Chapter 1 argues that standing scholarly debates have imposed an unhelpful set of concerns on the dialogues. Chapters 2 through 4 set out the basic literary and philosophical project of each dialogue. Chapter 5 argues that the three dialogues, taken as a set, are programmatic for a particular kind of philosophical undertaking, one which can be traced through Augustine's subsequent works.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erik Kenyon entered the University of Vermont as a Music major and left in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Greek and Philosophy. He earned a Master of Arts in Classics in 2004, also from UVM. As a graduate student in Cornell University's joint program in Ancient Philosophy, he has had the pleasure of moving among philosophers, philologists and historians. He was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy in 2012. While graduate school got in the way of his practicing, he has managed to keep up an alternate life as an organist.

M. J.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>C. Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>De beata v.</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>
<i>De ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>
<i>De mag.</i>	<i>De magistro</i>
<i>De mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>
<i>De imm. an.</i>	<i>De immortalitate animae</i>
<i>De lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>
<i>De quant. an.</i>	<i>De quantitate animae</i>
<i>De Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>De util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Retract.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Augustine's earliest dialogues are most fundamentally concerned with the practice of inquiry and how it should be done. When it comes to finding guidance, these works look foremost to the act of inquiry itself. The fact that we can inquire at all tells us various things about ourselves, and by reflecting on our own act of inquiry, we are put in a position to improve how we go about inquiring. From this basic idea, Augustine works out a method consisting of three main stages. An initial impasse gives rise to debates which fail to reach any definitive conclusion, which failure exposes the shortcomings of debaters' various assumptions and modes of thought. Yet each work moves beyond *aporia*, as Augustine reflects on these debates as instances of rational activity. From this, he draws various conclusions about human nature. And from these, he takes a great leap to various 'big picture' theories which he presents as 'worthy of approval.' We find this method at play in each work, while in each case the shift from debate to reflection on debate and the jump to some grand conclusion is marked by a formal shift from dialogue between characters to *oratio perpetua*.

Augustine presents this method as a process through which a teacher conceals his own views and un-teaches (*dedocere*) those of his student to prepare him for initiation into philosophical *mysteria*. This description of method provides a framework for making sense of each dialogue's seemingly sprawling lines of thought. Yet Augustine articulates this method in *Contra Academicos* [*C. Acad.*] by attributing it to the Academic skeptics. In a revisionist history of philosophy, he claims that the Academic skeptics were in fact crypto-Platonists who adopted a

method of un-teaching and concealment in response to Stoic materialism.¹ The most important Academic for Augustine is Cicero, “by whom Latin philosophy had its beginning and also its perfection.”² Cicero's philosophical works provide Augustine's main source of theories, arguments and definitions.³ Yet Cicero also provides a model for how to write philosophical dialogues, and the method of un-teaching and concealment which Augustine develops and employs to structure his own works provides a fruitful if historically implausible framework for approaching this father of Latin philosophy.⁴

The historical implausibility of Augustine's account of crypto-Platonist Academic skepticism has led many scholars to pass over it entirely. As a result, no one has yet appreciated the fact that through it Augustine provides the key to understanding the project he himself undertakes in these works. The odd marriage of the skeptical Academy and Platonism supplies the pedigree for Augustine's own philosophical method, and the alterations he makes to the dialogue genre serve his own project. Like Cicero before him, Augustine is content to pit competing views against each other without conclusively proving one over the other, and to end each work by declaring some view worthy of approval (*probabile*).⁵ Yet Augustine goes beyond Cicero and Academic practice, insofar as his reflections on rational activity provide some hook

1 While Plato's Academy went through several stages in its long life, it is the skeptical new Academy of Arcesilaus and Carneades that is most interesting for *C. Acad.* and the early dialogues. I will thus reserve the term 'Academic' for this particular skeptical period.

2 *Cicero...a quo in latina lingua philosophia et inchoata est et perfecta* [*C. Acad.* 1.8].

3 See Michael Foley, “Cicero, Augustine, and the Philosophical Roots of the Cassiciacum Dialogues,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 45 (1999): 51-77. I take a different view of the broader implications of such borrowings. See chapter 2 for discussion.

4 Augustine ultimately claims that Cicero's works *can* be read in this way; as to the question of whether or not Cicero had such readings in mind, Augustine is explicitly indifferent. See chapter 2 for discussion.

5 The English 'probable' is a false friend and has led to a great deal of misunderstanding in the literature. Augustine uses the term in its technical sense that has nothing to do with likelihood or probability. Augustine stresses that the term is interchangeable with 'truth-like' (*veri simile*) in Academic usage (*C. Acad.* 2.26). In the very final line of his *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero maintains an Academic skeptical position in claiming that the Stoic views expressed by his interlocutor Balbus “appear to him closer to likeness to truth” (*ad ueritatis similitudinem uideretur esse propensior*).

for these *probabile* conclusions.⁶ In this, Augustine's dialogues come closer to Platonic works such as the *Meno*.⁷ Whether or not Augustine had access to the relevant parts of the Platonic corpus,⁸ by combining strands of the “Platonic” tradition as disparate as Academic skeptical practice and a Platonist's (perhaps Plotinus') self-reflection on one's own rational activity, *C. Acad.* presents a cento of sorts, which approximates this Platonic original in significant ways.

Augustine's method is at bottom pedagogical or more specifically propaedeutic. Within ancient classifications, propaedeutic works were not part of philosophy itself but advanced a preliminary stage, through which the student was purified or otherwise prepared for philosophical undertakings.⁹ Augustine presents something close to this scheme in *De ordine*'s [*De ord.*] discussion of liberal study.¹⁰ Still, such a dichotomy is problematic in Augustine's case, since he favors the idea that philosophy's ultimate purpose is to purify the mind so that it may apprehend the Truth directly.¹¹ Augustine pursues such a course of purification by attempting to change the basic psychological mechanisms through which individuals perceive the world. To this end, he leads his interlocutors through a series of aporetic debates, by which they may come

6 Augustine also departs from Cicero, insofar as the view endorsed in the end is neither one of the views entertained at the start nor some kind of synthesis of them.

7 At *Meno* 81a-e an initial *aporia* sets the stage for Socrates' theory of recollection and account of the soul's rebirth, which are presented as something that priests, priestesses and Pindar talk about. The plausibility of this account is then illustrated through reflection on rational activity as exemplified in the famous geometry lesson (82b-85b). At best such reflections provide evidence for Socrates' theory, yet evidence which falls far short of demonstrative proof. See also 86b-c, where Socrates offers a practical argument, claiming his theory is worth believing simply on the grounds that doing so may make men less idle.

8 Pierre Courcelle argues that Augustine had access to the *Timeaus* through Cicero's translation but was otherwise limited to anecdotal knowledge of Plato's dialogues, e.g. Cicero's brief report of the *Meno*'s geometry lesson at *Disputationes tusculanae* 1.56. Pierre Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques en Occident, de Macrobie à Cassiodore* (Paris, 1943): 156-159. For a recent review of Cicero's translations of Plato into Latin, see J. G. F. Powell, “Cicero's Translations from Greek,” in *Cicero the Philosopher* (Oxford, 1995): 273-300.

9 For ancient classifications of philosophical dialogues, see Westernik, L., J. Trouillard & A. Segonds, trans. *Prologomènes à la philosophie de Platon* (Paris, 1990).

10 *De ord.* 2.35-50. See chapter 4 for discussion.

11 For the importance of “first-hand” knowledge in Augustine, see John Rist, “Certainty, belief and understanding” in *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), 41-91. For an overview of the goal of direct vision in Augustine and traces its antecedents in Plato and Plotinus, see Margaret Miles, ““*Facie ad faciem*”: Visuality, Desire, and the Discourse of the Other,” *Journal of Religion* 87/1 (2007): 43-58.

to terms with their own limitations, and then through a process of self-reflection, by which they may recognize their own rational capacities. Such reflections result in knowledge of various truths,¹² e.g. that human beings use knowable norms of thought in the process of inquiry. Yet these are not the truths which Augustine is ultimately interested in. The point of leading individuals to recognize their own capacities and limitations is to change or (as Augustine would have it) to correct how they think about themselves and their place in the world. By so doing, they are put in a position to see what is attractive about the grand theories which close each work. While such theories are presumably knowable in themselves, the method at work in the dialogues cannot bring us all the way to such knowledge.

In *C. Acad.*, Augustine adopts the terms of the Stoics and Academic skeptics, and claims to have shown his conclusion to be worthy of approval (*probabile*) or truth-like (*veri simile*), rather than showing it to be true (*verum*). While each dialogue offers evidence or good reason for its final conclusion, this is insufficient to demonstrate the certain truth, which the Stoics, Academics and Augustine alike require for knowledge.¹³ Each dialogue nevertheless makes some epistemic progress, insofar as this evidence is enough to arbitrate between competing authoritative sources. Just as importantly, each work makes psychological progress, as it brings individuals to recognize their own capacities and limitations, and through this self-knowledge to change how they perceive the world. The ultimate goal of this process is to bring individuals to the point that they can directly perceive the Truth which, Augustine argues, is none other than God. To do so is to attain happiness, the ultimate goal not only of philosophy but of human life

12 Or, to be precise, Augustine employs Stoic/Academic epistemological theory in claiming that such truths provide the content of cognitive impressions. See chapter 2 for discussion.

13 In this, Augustine does not claim either that his conclusion is false or that its truth cannot be shown; he merely claims that its truth has not been shown in the present work. See chapter 2 for discussion.

itself. It is in this sense that, for Augustine, all philosophy is propaedeutic.¹⁴

Within the Cassiciacum dialogues, the main obstacle to this perception of the Truth is materialism and its associated modes of thought. These must be 'un-learned' if one is to make progress towards the intellectual apprehension of Truth. A move from materialist to intellectualist modes of thought provides the overarching structure of each work. In *C. Acad.*, this plays out as a contest between two basic camps, represented by the materialist Stoics and the intellectualist crypto-Platonist Academic skeptics. Yet Augustine had only recently decided to embrace Catholic Christianity (which he places in the intellectualist camp) after several years' allegiance to the Manichees (whom he associates with the materialists): by allying school and sect in this way, Augustine uses rivalries between philosophical schools to present an argument for one form of Christianity over another.¹⁵

The last century of scholarly work on the dialogues has been dominated by concerns with one kind of 'accuracy' or another, which have played out primarily through two debates. Rudolf Hirzel initiated the first in 1895 by questioning the view that the dialogues are at bottom transcripts of actual conversations.¹⁶ Two years later, Ohlmann replied by defending the works' historicity.¹⁷ Various of his arguments were improved by Van Haeringen, while Meulenbroek

¹⁴ See chapter 5 for discussion.

¹⁵ It is clear enough, given Augustine's personal history, that the dialogues serve some kind of apologetic purpose. Meanwhile, Romanianus, dedicatee of *C. Acad.*, patron to Augustine and father to Augustine's student, Licentius, belonged to the Manichees as a result of Augustine's former evangelizing. In this light, the dialogues function as a palinode of sorts. Cf. *De Vera Religione*, which Augustine later dedicated to Romanianus for similar purposes. Catapano discusses Augustine's willingness at various points in his life to group Christianity and Platonism together on the basis of their intellectualism as opposed to "philosophers of this world" (Colossians 2:8). Giovanni Catapano, "The Development of Augustine's Metaphilosophy: *Col* 2:8 and the "Philosophers of this World"," *Augustinian Studies* 38/1 (2007): 233-254. My interest is not in what Augustine, the historical figure, may have believed, but in the arguments he presents, what they aim for, how they work, and how they structure these texts. I thus begin from a focus on 'philosophical' concerns and hold off systematic consideration of the 'religious' implications of my reading until chapter 5.

¹⁶ Rudolf Hirzel, *Der Dialog, ein literarhistorischer Versuch* (Leipzig, 1895), II, 377.

¹⁷ Desiderius Ohlmann, *De Sancti Augustini dialogis in Cassiciaco scriptis* (Straßburg, 1897).

brought additional support with his exhaustive efforts to argue that a *notarius* actually could accomplish the task of recording philosophical conversations as they unfold.¹⁸ To my mind, the debate reached a stalemate with O'Meara who argued that the claim to historicity was itself trope of the dialogue genre, and Madec who argued that the various generic conventions found in the dialogues reflect the fact that the discussions that actually occurred at Cassiciacum were modeled after the dialogues of Cicero.¹⁹

The second debate was initiated in 1918 by Prosper Alfaric who claimed that Augustine's famous conversion of 386 was to Neo-Platonism rather than Catholic Christianity.²⁰ Boyer, Theiler, O'Meara, Courcelle, O'Connell and Cutino have attempted to identify the sources of Augustine's Platonism and gauge Augustine's debt to them.²¹ The more theologically oriented studies of Holte, TeSelle, Harrison and Dobell have attempted to critique the state of Augustine's orthodoxy in the dialogues of 386.²²

18 Johann Hendrik Van Haeringen, *De Augustini ante baptismum rusticantis operibus* (Groningen, 1917); B. L. Meulenbroek, "The Historical Character of Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues," *Mnemosyne* 13 (1947): 203-29.

19 John O'Meara, "The Historicity of the Early Dialogues of Saint Augustine," *Vigiliae Christianae* 5 (1957): 150-178; Goulven Madec, "L'historicité des *Dialogues* de Cassiciacum," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 32 (1986): 207-231. The current scholarly consensus prefers treating the works as basically literary. Foley is a notable exception, although the only grounds he offers for this is "Augustine wouldn't lie" about the works' being records of actual conversations. Michael Foley, "Cicero and Augustine." Whatever the status of the future saint's moral character, it seems implausible to me that Augustine himself would have seen engaging in generic practices as lying in the first place. Cf. *De Mendacio* 2, where Augustine affirms as obvious that jokes do not count as lies, because no one expects them to be true.

20 Prosper Alfaric, *L'évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1918).

21 Charles Boyer, *Christianisme et néo-platonisme dans la formation de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1920); Willy Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Niemeyer, 1933); John O'Meara, "Neo-Platonism in the conversion of Saint Augustine," *Dominican Studies* 3 (1950): 334-43, and "Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* and Augustine's Dialogues of Cassiciacum," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 6 (1969): 107-138; Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1968); Robert O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, 1968); Michele Cutino, "I *Dialogi* di Agostino dinanzi al *De regressu animae* di Porfirio" *Recherches Augustiniennes* 27 (1994): 41-74. In a related vein, Solignac goes so far as to critique the accuracy of Augustine's knowledge of the pre-Socratics. Aimé Solignac, "Doxographies et manuels dans la formation philosophique de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 8-148.

22 Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris, 1962); Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York, 1970); Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology* (Oxford, 2006); Brian Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion* (Cambridge, 2009).

The various concerns underlying both debates stem ultimately from Augustine himself and the account he gives in *Confessions* [*Conf.*] of the thoughts and events surrounding his own conversion. In both debates, scholars have been preoccupied with gauging the extent to which the dialogues of 386 coincide or fail to coincide with the bishop's latter account: how accurately the dialogues recount events, how accurate Augustine's youthful grasp of Platonist philosophy and Catholic dogma might have been. All such approaches treat the early dialogues basically as repositories from which to draw Augustine's early views. The present study is interested in such approaches only insofar as they treat or more often fail to treat the dialogues as texts with their own literary and philosophical integrity.

The early dialogues have struck many scholars as literary failures, philosophically confused and lacking any robust principle of textual unity. It is possible that such impressions are, at least in part, what initially moved scholars to attempt making sense of these texts through the imposition of outside frameworks, be they *Conf.*'s narrative, Christian dogma, or Plotinian philosophy.²³ Whatever the initial motivation for such approaches might have been, such readings clearly have reinforced the impression of these works as lacking unity as texts.

We find an extreme example of this in a lingering vestige of the historicity debate. Cross-references internal to the dialogues, when combined with later sources' accounts of the dialogues' composition struck scholars as raising problems for situating the works into a single historical progression. Defenders of the historicity thesis have sought to resolve the problem by

23 O'Meara gives a nice summary of Ohlmann's arguments: either the dialogues are historical or they are literary failures; Augustine was a competent author, therefore the dialogues are historical. John O'Meara "Historicity," 154-5. O'Meara recognizes the rather unimpressive character of this line of argument, yet he elsewhere seems content to declare the dialogues literary and philosophical failures; see his introduction to *Against the Academics*. I myself read the dialogues as pursuing a 'Platonist' method, yet in this I merely follow the cues given in *C. Acad.* itself, and I make no claims about official Platonist practice (i.e. as was carried out within Plato's Academy and by such figures as Plotinus). In fact, Augustine's presentation of Platonist method finds no one clear historical antecedent.

rearranging the dialogues' individual *libri*, as a means of reconstructing the order in which their conversations actually occurred.²⁴ As the historicity debate has waned, scholars have simply accepted one order or another without comment, with the result that today, various scholars accept this project of rearranging individual books as an intellectually defensible one, while flatly rejecting the historicity thesis that this project initially served. Phillip Cary goes so far as to defend a new reordering while expressly admitting the literary quality of the works,²⁵ and Joanne McWilliam leaves the three dialogues whole but situates them between the two books of the *Solioquia*, which never figured in the historicity debate in the first place.²⁶ I take this project of rearranging individual *libri* to be fundamentally misguided, insofar as it violates the literary and philosophical unity of individual works composed of multiple *libri*. In the end, I take the narrative order of the dialogues to match the order in which Augustine discusses them in *Retractationes* 1.1-3, viz. *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.*, *De ord.*²⁷

The last five years have seen a turn away from concerns with these sorts of accuracy and a new interest in making sense of the dialogues in self-professedly literary ways. Catherine

24 *C. Acad.* 2.1 refers to a seven-day break from debate (*septem fere diebus a disputando fuimus otiosi*) which provides enough time for all of *De beata v.* and *De ord.*, while at *Retract.* 1.2, Augustine reports that he wrote *De beata v.* not after but 'between' the books of *C. Acad.* (*non post libros de Academicis, sed inter illos*), and likewise at *Retr.* 1.3.1 he reports that *De ord.* was written '*inter illos qui de Academicis scripti sunt*.' Internal cross-references are provided at *De beata v.* 13, which clearly refers to the debate of *C. Acad.* 1, and at *De ord.* 2.1 which refers to the birthday feast recounted in *De beata v.* Ohlmann gives the order *C. Acad.* 1, *De beata v.*, *De ord.* 1, *C. Acad.* 2-3, *De ord.* 2; Van Haeringen distinguishes between the order in which the conversations occurred, viz. *C. Acad.* 1-3, *De ord.* 1, *De beata v.*, *De ord.* 2, and the order in which their literary accounts were composed, viz. *C. Acad.* 1, *De beata v.*, *De ord.* 1-2, *C. Acad.* 2-3.

25 Phillip S. Cary, "What Licentius learned," *Augustinian Studies* 29/1 (1998): 141-163. Cary argues for the order *C. Acad.* 1, *De beata v.*, *De ord.*, *C. Acad.* 2-3. His argument, which traces the whereabouts of Augustine's friend Alypius is ingenious, although I will argue below that a cross-reference not yet noticed within the scholarship makes this ordering impossible. My more substantive disagreement with Cary comes in his *explanation* for this order, which makes Academic skepticism a mere obstacle to be overcome. See my chapter on *C. Acad.* for discussion.

26 Joanne McWilliam, "The Cassiciacum autobiography," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1990): 14-43.

27 My reasons for endorsing this order are entirely internal to the dialogues themselves. I will thus build a case for this order as I discuss each work individually in chapters 2-4, reserving synoptic discussion of this issue until chapter 5.

Conybeare and Brian Stock address the works' seeming lack of order by looking to the role of emotion within them.²⁸ Both find a tension between rational argument and emotional outburst. Conybeare sets concerns for argument to the side and seeks an 'emotional logic' as what ultimately gives the texts their unity. On Stock's reading, emotion presents the main obstacle to rational inquiry in these works, and the shift from debate to *oratio perpetua* dramatizes the shortcomings of 'open dialogue,' i.e. between multiple human beings, and demonstrates the need for 'inner dialogue' or soliloquy, which Stock finds in the *orationes* that conclude each work.²⁹ I present a third approach. By articulating Augustine's methodology and clarifying the goals of his project, we find that the process of rational inquiry along with all the emotions that surround it form vital components of the dialogues' line of inquiry. This is clearest in *De beata uita* [*De beata v.*], where argument and affect come to serve as explicit *objects* of inquiry, while at the same time providing the *means* by which that same inquiry is advanced.³⁰

It is generally accepted that the dialogue genre poses problems for attributing particular beliefs and objectives to an author. In practice, however, scholars have given almost no attention to identifying and understanding the problems posed by Augustine's dialogues in particular. The present study addresses the basic question of what it would mean to read Augustine's dialogues

28 Catherine Conybeare, *Irrational Augustine*; Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2010). Such studies are new, in that they are primarily concerned with these texts as texts, and they approach them in primarily literary ways. Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, while primarily concerned with reconstructing Augustine's theological perspectives and practices, offers numerous insights into how these texts work as texts. Foley usefully presents various literary motifs and features running through *De ord.*, although when it comes to explaining how the three dialogues work as a set, he looks beyond the texts themselves, invoking Cicero's dialogues as providing the pre-Christian model to which Augustine gives a Christian reply through a series of 'antiphonal-referents.' Michael Foley, *The De Ordine of St. Augustine* (PhD diss., Boston College, 1999). The essays in Goldhill's new collection deal with questions of dialogue more broadly, and why Christians (supposedly) didn't write them. Simon Goldhill, ed. *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (Oxford, 2008). I discuss this briefly in chapter 5.

29 I do not agree with Stock's equation of the works' *orationes perpetuae* and 'inner dialogue,' such as we find in Augustine's somewhat later dialogue, *Soliloquia*. See chapter 5 for discussion.

30 See my chapter 3 for discussion.

as dialogues. Our task is not simply to identify which character acts as the author's mouthpiece. Rather, we must situate the works' various claims and arguments (put forth by a number of different characters) within a series of three stages, each of which carries a different purpose and provides a different kind of justification for its eventual conclusions. The arguments of the works' initial debates are *meant* to fail and through this failure underscore various short-comings in characters' beliefs. Self-reflective discoveries, which move each work beyond *aporia*, are not arrived at through arguments –either deductively or inductively– but through direct apprehension of one's own rational activities, as exemplified in the dialogues' own aporetic debates. The grand conclusions arrived at in the end are not meant to be proven true but are presented (in borrowed Academic terms) as merely *probabile*.³¹

These three stages fit together by a certain internal logic. Each initial impasse is ultimately resolved only by un-learning one perspective and noticing some specific rational capacity used in working through it, while both processes prepare the person engaged with this impasse for some *probabile* conclusion. Each initial impasse encodes a script of sorts. It is the character of Augustine who sets these initial impasses, guides his interlocutors as they work through them and eventually completes the script when his interlocutors can go no further.³²

31 Simon Harrison takes an approach similar to mine, insofar as he attempts to make sense of *De lib. arbit.* as a unified text, rather than a repository of views or some kind of way station in Augustine's development from Platonism to Pauline Christianity. In the end, Harrison presents a reading of *De libero arbitrio* that corresponds roughly with the three stages I see set out at Cassiciacum. My hope is that the present study may complement Harrison's by situating it within Augustine's broader project of writing dialogues and the development of his early philosophical methodology. Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De Libero Arbitrio* (Oxford, 2006).

32 It is at this point that each work shifts from debate to *oratio perpetua*. Since Augustine's interlocutors are better at debating their way into *aporia* than they are at getting out of it through self-reflection, the transition to *oratio perpetua* tends to coincide roughly with the shift from the first of Augustine's three stages to the second. Yet Augustine's companions do eventually gain facility with this method; as a result, we find reflection on the act of debate appearing earlier and earlier *within* the debates of each successive work. See chapter 5 for discussion. See also the later, *De libero arbitrio*, whose debate ends as Augustine's interlocutor, Evodius, agrees to a point but asks Augustine where he is heading (*Consentio, sed quorsum ista?*, *De lib. arbit.* 3.10).

The project of Augustine, the character, thus corresponds for the most part with the project of Augustine, the author ultimately in control of each work's overall direction. There are times when it will help us to distinguish between these two Augustines. Most notable is the beginning of *De ord.*, where Augustine, the author, presents Providence in the guise of a Platonist teacher, who sets initial impassés through a series of coincidences. This results in an odd scenario in which Augustine, the character, ends up vying with Providence for control of the proceedings.³³ But apart from such situations, I will simply refer to 'Augustine,' that is to the character whose project reflects the overarching project of each work. Yet in doing so, I do not claim to have identified the projects, goals or beliefs of Augustine, the historical individual. Presumably people who write works of literature which pursue certain goals and argue for certain positions, do so because they themselves subscribe to these positions and value these goals. But in the case of Augustine, scholars have, in my opinion, far too often jumped to questions of what Augustine *thought*, without giving sufficient understanding of what he *did* in writing the texts that come down to us. It is this latter, more modest task that I address.

The scholarly failure to appreciate how these dialogues 'work' is manifest most clearly in readings of *C. Acad.* The aporetic debate of *C. Acad.* 1 is routinely passed over as some kind of school exercise, the history that concludes *C. Acad.* 3 is passed over as bizarre. At least one scholar has recommended skipping the work's debates altogether,³⁴ while various scholars have held up at least six different passages as presenting the work's "definitive refutation of skepticism."³⁵ There is not even consensus as to why Augustine wants to refute Academic

33 See chapter 4. I do not take this identification of author and character to hold for all of Augustine's works. In *Sol.*, for instance, it is not the character of Augustine but *Ratio*, who sets out puzzles, directs their resolution, and would presumably continue this resolution to its end if the work had been completed. See chapter 5 for discussion.

34 Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938): 311.

35 An argument from *veri similia* at *C. Acad.* 2.16; a series of dilemmas at *C. Acad.* 3.18-21; a list of cognitive

skepticism in the first place. Skepticism has been held up as an obstacle, variously, to liberal study, faith in divine revelation, and laying the foundations of a demonstrative science.³⁶ But despite such differing opinions, all agree that Augustine saw skepticism as an obstacle, one which must be overcome before proceeding to non-skeptical projects. This general view may be true, so far as it goes, yet in practice, interpreters too often slide from it to the assumption that Academic skepticism, once refuted, no longer plays any significant role in Augustine's thought, which view is manifestly false.

I address this scholarly morass by distinguishing between the various different practices employed by the Academic skeptics, viz. their demand for certainty; their arguments against the possibility of knowledge and the rationality of assent; their use of *probabile* impressions in situations of uncertainty. By tracing how *C. Acad.* treats each of these different practices, we may reevaluate these different treatments, many of which plainly fail if viewed as attempts merely to refute the Academic skeptics. On my reading, Augustine adopts and adapts as much from the Academics as he refutes.³⁷ The demand for certainty, which led the Academics to reject the possibility of knowledge, in Augustine's hands serves to un-teach false and problematic perspectives, such as we find in the aporetic debates of *C. Acad.* 1. The same demand for certainty provides the touchstone for the self-reflective discoveries that move each work beyond *aporia*. Yet even after showing that some things can be known as certain, Augustine takes up the use of *probabile* impressions, as a means of pursuing important matters whose certainty is still

impressions at *C. Acad.* 2.21-29; first-person statements of subjective states from the same stretch of text; an 'ethical argument' at *C. Acad.* 3.34-36; the authority of the incarnate Christ at *C. Acad.* 3.42-43. See chapter 2 for discussion.

36 See chapter 2 for discussion.

37 The idea that Augustine might find some value in skepticism finds a quite different expression in Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, 43-47, who suggests that Augustine felt positively about an 'intuitive skepticism,' i.e. one that finds pithy truth in verbal oppositions, but rejected formal Academic skepticism which he knew through Cicero.

beyond ereach. The Academics provide not only the subject matter of *C. Acad.*, they provide the raw material from which Augustine forges the three-stage method at play in *C. Acad.* and his dialogues generally. By acknowledging this positive debt to the Academics, we make considerable progress in understanding how Augustine's dialogues function as texts, the shape of their overarching dialectic, and the various purposes underlying *C. Acad.*'s many different treatments of Academic skepticism.

Looking to the dialogues' formal features, Bernd Reiner Voss and Martin Claes have seen the transition from debate to *oratio perpetua* as marking a breakdown of reason and an appeal to authority.³⁸ It is true that Augustine presents his closing accounts as worthy of approval rather than known to be true, and that he explicitly connects these accounts with the authority of Platonism, the Incarnate Christ and *doctissimi viri*.³⁹ Yet this is not some dogmatic appeal to brute authority arrived at through the failure of rational thought. Rather, the failure of initial debates and the self-reflective discoveries arrived at through reflection on these debates are what prepare readers to see these *particular* authorities as attractive.⁴⁰ On my reading, the shift from debate to *oratio perpetua* does not mark the breakdown of reason, but a shift from one rational process to another. Initial debates proceed through dialectical argument, i.e. discussion of deductive and inductive arguments, a search for definitions, attempts to catch opponents in self-

38 Bernd Reiner Voss, *Der Dialog in der Frühchristlichen Literatur* (München, 1970); Martin Claes, "Limitations to the *exercitatio mentis*: changes in rhetorical style in Augustine's dialogues," *Augustiniana* 57 (2007): 387-98. At the very least, such readings sit ill with the large number of rational arguments found in the dialogues' closing *orationes*.

39 For Platonism and the Incarnate Christ, see *C. Acad.* 3.43. For "most learned men," see *De ord.* 2.31.

40 In *C. Acad.*, for instance, the failure to establish any certainty through empirical modes of thought, coupled with the discovery that we use certain rules of thought in the act of inquiry prepare us to see as attractive epistemological accounts which posit the existence of non-empirical / 'intellectual' sources of cognition. This amounts to good evidence for the authority of Catholic Christianity (which Augustine takes to hold an intellectualist position) but not Manichee Christianity (which he takes to be thoroughly empiricist). Given that both versions of Christianity claim that authority of Christ, it is only through *C. Acad.*'s process of *aporia* and reflection that Augustine has any grounds (at least within the dialogues) for picking out which version of Christianity is worthy of approval.

contradiction, etc. Such debates do in fact break down, insofar as they fail to reach any conclusion, yet this is not a failure of reason, but simply an elenctic use of it, as found in Plato's Socratic dialogue.⁴¹ Yet Augustine goes beyond Socratic practice, as he proceeds via *oratio perpetua* to reflection on that act of debate, drawing out the implications of the rational activities that he and his companions engage in. This too is a rational process, albeit one that proceeds through direct observation rather than dialectical argument.⁴² The *probabile* account that closes each work, while it is not marked by an additional formal division, is also arrived at through a rational process, albeit it one different from dialectical argument or direct observation, one which appeals to evidence or good reason.⁴³

The period between Cassiciacum and the writing of *Conf.* has been minutely scrutinized, as scholars have attempted to reconstruct Augustine's development or lack of development over the first few decades of his literary output. Peter Brown's biography of Augustine, first published in 1967, has been the most influential statement of the developmentalist reading, according to which Augustine moved from an early "classical optimism" to a mature Pauline doctrine of grace.⁴⁴ Against this, Carol Harrison has most recently defended a unitarian reading, arguing that all the elements of Augustine's mature theology are to be found within the early works; even more recently, Brian Dobell has defended a developmentalist reading, arguing that it was only

41 Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Augustin et la fin de la culture*, 308-315, argues that in *C. Acad.* and *De ord.* it is only the closing *orationes* that provide any positive contribution to the overarching goal of the work. Yet from the fact that the works' debates provide no *positive* contribution, Marrou concludes that they are merely dialectical exercises meant to prepare Augustine's companions for these concluding *orationes*. On my reading, it is not so much that debates fail to reach definite conclusions, as they succeed at reaching negative ones.

42 I side with Brian Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, in seeing this transition as a move from one type of rational inquiry to another, although I disagree as to what the difference between these two types of inquiry amounts to. Stock stresses the presence or absence of other people, the possibility of misunderstanding and petty rivalry that may ensue. My reading is fairly indifferent to how many individuals are present.

43 Appeals to evidence are, of course, often part of dialectical argument. The more substantial difference between Augustine's first and third stages comes in their psychological functions. See chapter 2.

44 Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography* (Berkeley, 2000). See also Robert Markus, *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career* (Villanova, 1989).

over the course of several years that Augustine came to appreciate the implications of his own early view of Christ, which he would later identify with the Photian heresy.⁴⁵ While the dialogues make significant forays into Christian theology,⁴⁶ the issues which Augustine would later use to divide Christians from non-Christian Platonists⁴⁷ simply do not arise in these works. As a result, developmentalists and unitarians alike are left to build their arguments *e silentio*, and there is no definitive resolution in sight, given the terms of this debate.⁴⁸

My reading shows that the whole project of using Augustine's dialogues to reconstruct Augustine's development (or lack of development) is fundamentally problematic. I provide a principled reason for thinking that the dialogues simply do not offer the right kind of evidence for either side of the unitarian / developmentalist debate: these works set out to explain what it is about human beings *at the most basic level* that makes them capable of engaging in inquiry and attaining happiness; in the end, we are presented with only the broadest account, which quite consistently fails to mention any of the issues relevant to this debate.⁴⁹ But even if such issues *had* been raised at Cassiciacum, I cannot see how this would have made any difference to the dialogues' ultimate account: Augustine's method proceeds from facts about human nature that are accessible to any individual who simply stops to reflect on his own rational activities; this is

45 Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology* (Oxford, 2006); Brian Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion* (Cambridge, 2009).

46 Explicitly Christian language is by and large absent from these texts. At *Conf.* 9.7 Augustine attributes this to Alypius' having seen such language as inappropriate for such a context. Be that as it may, the Incarnation features prominently, albeit briefly, at *C. Acad.* 3.42, and *De beata v.* culminates in an account of the Holy Trinity (*De beata v.* 34-35). *De ord.* is centrally concerned with questions of providence, but it is unclear what if anything is specifically Christian about its discussion.

47 Namely, fallen human nature, the necessity of grace, and Christ as Mediator.

48 The fact that Augustine avoids these divisive issues so successfully at least suggests that he had knowingly placed them beyond the scope of his undertaking. Yet this is mere speculation on my part.

49 This is a substantive claim, which I will go on to defend in discussing the dialogues, one by one. I use Augustine's three-stage method as a framework in each case: while the dialogues' debates present a huge array of questions, theories and arguments, I look to the works' final *probabile* conclusions for the moral psychological account that the dialogues ultimately endorse.

simply not the right basis from which to draw conclusions about fallen natures or grace.⁵⁰

Having raised problems for attempts to trace Augustine's *doctrinal* development, my reading suggests an alternative model for tracing the progression across works. Augustine's propaedeutic method aims to change the way we perceive the world. Borrowing this visual image, I suggest that we might think of each work bringing into clearer focus some feature of human psychology and its relation to intelligible reality. The result is a series of adumbrations, each of which goes some way to fill out the last, while the ultimate goal of this process is direct vision of the divine reality in which we already in some sense live. This model provides a middle way between developmentalist view of Augustine who “thought as he wrote, and wrote as he thought,”⁵¹ contradicting himself all the while, and the unitarians' systematic world view, fully worked out from the beginning and presented one piece at a time. Both extremes, when presented as extremes, are surely wrong. But the way forward is not to draw a continuum between them and find the right middle spot to defend, but to set aside this focus on doctrinal details and to find a different way of approaching the connections between these works.

It turns out that the approach to the Cassiciacum dialogues that best captures the unity of each text individually also lays bare the progression from one to the other. In chapters 2-4, I will attempt to read each dialogue as a unified whole. In so doing, I identify the particular goals set out in each, and I show how the various parts of each work pursue these goals by means of Augustine's three-stage method. The end in each case is propaedeutic: *C. Acad.* seeks to make us see it as *probabile* that there is an intelligible world to which we are somehow related. *De beata v.* seeks to make us see it as *probabile* that a certain kind of relation to this intelligible

⁵⁰ I defend this view in chapter 5.

⁵¹ Brian Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, 19.

world is what human happiness consists in. *De ord.*, finally, elaborates what this relationship amounts to and suggests ways that we might go about improving it, although again this case is presented as merely *probabile*. Against developmentalists I see each work as filling out rather than working out new details. Against unitarians I see the dialogues as ultimately effecting a change in perspective rather than establishing and accumulating doctrine.

At the same time, I track the dialogues' explicit concern with method. I argue that *C. Acad.* 3's secret history of the Academy presents us with Augustine's basic method, that *De beata v.* articulates the role of emotion and the affective dimensions of inquiry within this method, and that *De ord.* attributes this method to Providence herself, thus explaining a fundamental feature of the world that makes it good for human beings, while at the same time giving the psychological and metaphysical underpinnings of what made Augustine's three-stage 'Platonist' method work in the first place. The Cassiciacum works are programmatic insofar as they are concerned with articulating, modeling and justifying this method. In chapter 5, I suggest how the methodology set out at Cassiciacum can be used to make sense of Augustine's later dialogues as individual texts and to situate them within a progression.

The passages of actual debate that make up the bulk of the Cassiciacum texts present gloriously complicated and often convoluted lines of argument. I will simply pass over most of this material. Karen Schlapbach and Therese Fuhrer have produced good philosophical / philological commentaries on *C. Acad.* 1 and *C. Acad.* 2-3, respectively;⁵² Jean Doignon has produced critical editions and mostly philological notes on *De beata v.* and *De ord.* through the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* series;⁵³ and Jörg Trelenberg has produced a philological /

52 Karin Schlapbach, *Augustin Contra Academicos (vel De Academicis) Buch 1 Einleitung und Kommentar* (Berlin, 2003); Therese Fuhrer, *Augustin: Contra Academicos Bücher 2 und 3* (Berlin, 1997).

53 Jean Doignon, *Œuvres de Saint Augustin: Dialogues Philosophiques: La Vie Heureuse* (Paris 1986); *Œuvres de Saint Augustin: Dialogues Philosophiques: L'Ordre* (Paris, 1997).

philosophical commentary on *De ord.*⁵⁴ What is still lacking is a clear account of what all this argument is *for*. Or at least a correct one.⁵⁵ While my reading is admittedly interpretive, it makes sense of, in fact starts from, elements of the dialogues which are routinely passed over as irrelevant to or counter-productive for the goals which these works are normally thought to pursue. Having presented a holistic, synoptic view of the project undertaken in these works, and drawn out the implications of this view for the scholarship, I will let the dialogues speak for themselves in all their clumsy grandeur. If the present study may contribute anything useful to the reader of these works, it will be a better sense of what to listen for.

⁵⁴ Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*. In addition to this, Michael Foley presents a great deal of literary insight in his dissertation on this dialogue, while Bouton-Touboullic situates *De ord.* within a broad-ranging discussion of Augustine's thought on order. Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboullic, *L'orde caché* (Paris, 2004).

⁵⁵ As Eugene TeSelle puts it, in *Augustine the Theologian*, 24, the challenge is to 'construe' what Augustine says.

CHAPTER 2

Contra Academicos

C. Acad. presents the Academic skeptics⁵⁶ as engaging in four basic practices.⁵⁷ Over the course of the work, Augustine attacks some of these practices while adopting others, albeit for non-Academic reasons. The reconfigured set of Academic practices that results provides the methodology that Augustine himself employs in the dialogues. In a revisionist history of philosophy, Augustine identifies his own methodology as 'Platonist' and claims that the Academics themselves employed such a method, as they pursued a secret Platonist agenda. While Augustine's account of his philosophical predecessors is historically implausible, it allows him to claim a double pedigree, both Academic and Platonist, for his own project.

The Academics begin by adopting Zeno's Stoic definition of the cognitive impression,⁵⁸ as one which (a) is true, (b) is impressed from what is the case, and (c) could not have been impressed from what is not the case.⁵⁹ According to this third criterion, (c), an impression fails to be cognitive if there is even the possibility that a state of affairs other than the one portrayed may

56 The term 'skeptical' is used by neither the New Academics nor Augustine. Sextus Empiricus is our first attested source. He uses the term '*skeptikos*' to denote a seeker after truth in opposition to a 'dogmatist' who considers himself to have found the truth or what we might call a 'negative-dogmatist' who holds that the truth cannot be found [*Outlines of Skepticism* 1.33]. Sextus claims that followers of his own Pyrrhonian school *are* skeptics, while the New Academics are what we might call negative-dogmatists. See Gisela Striker, "On the difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics," in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996): 135-49. I will use the term 'skeptical' merely to denote those who hold that knowledge has not been (or perhaps cannot be) found by current means and therefore recommend that one refrain from holding any belief.

57 These are set out at *C. Acad.* 2.11-15. See below.

58 Zeno uses variations of the Greek verb καταλαμβάνω (to grasp) to refer to this idea. Augustine uses Latin equivalents coined by Cicero: *percipio*, *comprehendo*. In the absence of a good English equivalent, I will follow Anthony Long & David Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987) in reserving 'cognition' and its cognates for this technical sense, i.e. a 'cognitive impression' as one that can be grasped; 'cognition' as the epistemic state that results from assenting to such an impression. Since the verb 'cognize' makes for laborious prose, I will reserve 'grasp' for the act of assenting to a cognitive impression.

59 ...*id uerum percipi posse, quod ita esset in animo impressum ex eo, unde esset, ut esse non posset ex eo, unde non esset* (*C. Acad.* 2.11).

have brought about an impression with the same content.⁶⁰ The Academics use this criterion to argue that cognition is impossible, since for any impression, even if it is true, it is always possible that an impression with the same content could be produced by an optical illusion, divine possession, madness, dreaming, etc.⁶¹ The Academics use the impossibility of cognition, in conjunction with the Stoic definition of error as assent to the incognitive, to argue that it is irrational ever to assent to any impression. And in reply to the Stoic *apraxia* (inactivity) argument that a person who never assents to anything would be rendered completely inactive, the Academics replied that one may perform actions by approving impressions as 'worthy of approval' (*probabile*) or 'truth like' (*veri simile*) without assenting to them as true (*verum*).⁶² To put it briefly, the Academics:

- (1) adopt Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression
- (2) argue that cognition is impossible
- (3) argue that assent is always irrational
- (4) approve *probabilia* as a means of performing actions

Each of these four practices is discussed at length within *C. Acad.*⁶³ As a result, the work

60 Or at least content similar enough to be indistinguishable. If I am in Athens, for instance, and I perceive that I am in Athens, my impression that I am in Athens, while true, is not certain, since it is possible that I am in Rome and merely dreaming that I am in Athens. My impression that I am in Athens is thus not cognitive, since it fails to meet Zeno's certainty criterion. For discussion of Augustine's use of Zeno's criterion, see Therese Fuhrer, "Das Kriterium der Wahrheit in Augustins *Contra Academicos*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 257-275.

61 Augustine gives these instances within a general list of the kinds of examples the Academics would use to challenge claims to knowledge: "Thus disagreements between philosophers, errors of the senses, dreams and fury, fallacies and sophisms all flourished in service of this cause" (*Inde dissensiones philosophorum, inde sensuum fallaciae, inde somnia furoresque, inde pseudomenoe et soritae in illius causae patrocinio uiguerunt, C. Acad. 2.11*).

62 The English term 'probable,' the French '*probable*' and their cognates are false friends: the Stoic/Academic notion of *probabile* is closer captured by 'plausible,' i.e. something worthy of belief. Any sense of likelihood is an artifact of translation. See Miles Burnyeat, "Carneades Was No Probablist," unpublished; James Allen, "Academic Probabilism and Stoic epistemology," *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994): 85-113. Failure to make such distinctions has led to great confusion in studies of *C. Acad.* See most especially Bernard J. Diggs, "St. Augustine against the Academicians," *Traditio* 7 (1951): 73-93.

63 I have formulated this list in terms of practices in order to avoid complexities that are not relevant for the present undertaking. It is unclear whether the Academics themselves endorsed Zeno's certainty criterion, and the impossibility of cognition and irrationality of assent which they argued followed from it, or simply presented all of this material dialectically, in an *ad hominem* attack against Stoic theory. Either way, the Academics do *use* this criterion and they do *argue* for these conclusions. But by approaching Academic skepticism in terms of *practices*, we capture what it is about Academic philosophy that is most relevant to the big project of *C. Acad.*,

presents several different discussions of Academic skepticism, each of which has been held up by various scholars as presenting *C. Acad.*'s "definitive refutation." Blake Dutton focuses on a series of dilemmas at *C. Acad.* 3.18-21, which build from the supposedly cognitive status of Zeno's definition itself.⁶⁴ Gareth Matthews looks to *C. Acad.* 3.21-29 for the list of candidate cognitive impressions taking the form of logical necessities, mathematical truths and first-person statements of subjective states.⁶⁵ Therese Fuhrer focuses on Augustine's argument at *C. Acad.* 2.16 that the Academics could not identify *veri similia* without prior acquaintance with *vera*.⁶⁶ Christopher Kirwan presents a critical appraisal of all these passages and finds each lacking.⁶⁷ John Heil, David Mosher, and Brian Harding share in this general appraisal of what they have dubbed *C. Acad.*'s 'epistemological arguments,' and they proceed to argue that the work's real refutation of the Academics comes in an 'ethical argument' at *C. Acad.* 3.34-36.⁶⁸ John O'Meara, Ragnar Holte and Matthias Smalbrugge go further. Declaring all such arguments failures, they conclude that Augustine's refutation of the Academics rests ultimately on the

viz. their way of going about philosophical inquiry, their methodology which in turn employs various assumptions, arguments and commitments. This is clearest when it comes to the Academics' use of *probabile* impressions: there is no particular set of impressions that the Academics identified as *probabile*; it is rather the practice of using such impressions, whatever they may be, that is characteristic of their school.

64 To put it briefly, Augustine argues that it is the case either that Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression itself provides the content for a cognitive impression and thus shows cognition to be possible, or else that Zeno's definition cannot serve as the basis for Academic epistemology, in which case Academic arguments against the possibility of cognition are undermined. Blake Dutton, "Augustine, Academic Skepticism, and Zeno's Definition," *Augustiniana* 53 (2003): 7-30.

65 Gareth Matthews, *Augustine* (Oxford, 2005): 15-22. For the first-person statements of subjective states, see also Therese Fuhrer, "Skeptizismus und Subjektivität: Augustins antiskeptische Argumentation und das Konzept der Verinnerlichung," in *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität*, ed. Reto Luzius Fetz, Roland Hagenbüchle & Peter Schulz (Berlin, 1998): 319-339.

66 Therese Fuhrer, "Der Begriff *veri simile* bei Cicero und Augustin," *Museum Helveticum* 50/2 (1993): 107-125.

67 Christopher Kirwan, "Against the Sceptics," in *Augustine* (London, 1989), 15-34.

68 On this reading, Augustine counters the Academics' prohibition against assent, on the grounds that such a prohibition undermines morality. John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: the *Contra Academicos*," *Harvard Theological Review* 65/1 (1972): 99-116; David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 89-114; Brian Harding, "Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 37/2 (2006): 247-274. For a 'politicized' version of this general reading, see Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* (New York, 1996).

authority of the Incarnate Christ, as expressed at *C. Acad.* 3.42-43.⁶⁹ Each of these different interpretations focuses on relatively small passages of text and as a result passes over what's left as so many 'warm ups,' 'after thoughts' and 'didactic' digressions.⁷⁰

Just as scholars cannot agree as to what *C. Acad.*'s refutation of Academic skepticism ultimately is, there is also little agreement as to what this refutation is for. Heil, Mosher and Harding see skepticism as a corrupting influence on moral behavior; Curley as undermining civic society. Foley presents skepticism as an obstacle that must be overcome before one may take up faith in revealed doctrine,⁷¹ Cary and Topping present it as an obstacle to undertaking a course of liberal study,⁷² Trelenberg, as an obstacle to laying the foundations of a demonstrative science;⁷³ Matthews, as an obstacle to further philosophical inquiry through a project of faith seeking understanding.⁷⁴ Yet all these scholars agree that Augustine saw skepticism as an obstacle, one which must be overcome before proceeding to non-skeptical projects. It is this last point that I call into question.

69 John O'Meara, "Neo-Platonism in the conversion of Saint Augustine," *Dominican Studies* 3 (1950): 334-43; Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris, 1962); Matthias Smalbrugge, "L'Argumentation Probabiliste d'Augustin," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 32 (1986): 41-55.

70 For *C. Acad.* 1 as a "school exercise," see Joanne McWilliam, "The Cassiciacum autobiography," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1990): 14-43; Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*. For *C. Acad.* 1 as "protreptic" in a way that the rest of the work is not, see Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned," Pierre Valentin, "Un Protreptique Conservé de l'Antiquité: Le *Contra Academicos*" de Saint Augustin," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 43/1 (1969): 1-26. For the public history in *C. Acad.* 2 as "didactic," see Matthias Smalbrugge, "L'Argumentation Probabiliste."

71 Michael Foley, "Cicero and Augustine." Mourant claims that in *C. Acad.* Augustine sets out to refute the Academics because they provide an obstacle to *others'* belief, most importantly the work's dedicatee, Rominianus. John Mourant, "Augustine and the Academics" *Recherches Augustiniennes* 4 (1966): 86. See also John O'Meara, "Neo-Platonism in the conversion of Saint Augustine," *Dominican Studies* 3 (1950): 334-43; Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris, 1962); Alven Michael Neiman, "The Argument of Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982): 255-279; Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34/2 (2003): 197-212.

72 Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned," Ryan Topping, "The Perils of Skepticism: The Moral and Educational Argument of *Contra Academicos*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 49/3 (2009): 333.

73 Jörg Trelenberg, *Augustins Schrift De ordine* (Tübingen, 2009).

74 Gareth Matthews, *Thought's ego in Augustine and Descartes* (Ithaca, 1992). See Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse*, for the statement of a similar position and discussion of this issue in earlier scholarship.

In *C. Acad.* Augustine refutes the Academic skeptics, insofar as he overturns their arguments against the possibility of cognition and the rationality of assent. Yet having done so, Augustine is not done with the Academics. In fact, the non-skeptical projects that he turns to are heavily indebted to the Academics' certainty requirement and their use of *probabilia* in situations of uncertainty. In the end, Augustine adapts as much from the Academics as he refutes, and it is first and foremost from a confrontation with these figures, Cicero in particular, that he articulates his own philosophical method. In what follows, I will trace how *C. Acad.*'s different treatments of Academic skepticism contribute to this constructive project. This will help us see the motivation behind the work's plethora of arguments, many of which are less than impressive if viewed as attempts merely to refute the Academics.⁷⁵ This confrontation with Academic skepticism produces the method which structures not only *C. Acad.* but all of Augustine's extant dialogues, and provides a vital key to understanding Augustine's early corpus.

The text of *C. Acad.* divides into two unequal parts.⁷⁶ The beginning through *C. Acad.* 3.14 presents debates over various Academic positions and arguments. At *C. Acad.* 3.15 Augustine embarks on a new beginning of sorts (*quasi aliud ingressus exordium*) and continues the work's inquiry in seemingly new directions via *oratio perpetua*.⁷⁷ I argue that this formal

75 It may also be that these different arguments are meant to form a cumulative case against skepticism. This is expressly rejected by Harding et al. who defend the 'moral reading' on the grounds that the dialogue's 'epistemological arguments' fail.

76 See Appendix for an outline of my *divisio textus*.

77 Alypius, who has been Augustine's debate partner up to this point, uses this rhetorical term for 'uninterrupted speech' as a way of bowing out of debate (*C. Acad.* 3.14). Augustine uses it again as he complies with Alypius' wish (*C. Acad.* 3.15). The same formal division between debate and *oratio perpetua* appears in six of Augustine's seven complete dialogues, yet it is referred to as such in only one other instance, at the very end of *De mag.* where Adeodatus thanks his father for the speech he just gave (*De mag.* 46). I take *C. Acad.*'s presentation to be programmatic: Augustine not only employs the formal feature that was to stay with him for the rest of his dialogues, he draws attention to the fact that he's doing so. While we do not find the same formal division within the *De mus.*, I argue that we still find the same methodological progression in this work and *Conf.* as well. See chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

division marks a shift in the type of argument at play.⁷⁸ *C. Acad.*'s longer first half presents a first-order debate in which one set of characters defends various Academic positions and another set attacks them. Their debate reaches no definitive conclusion. With the move to *oratio perpetua*, Augustine steps out of the initial debates' dichotomies and reflects on what it was that allowed him and his interlocutors to engage in such debate in the first place. This second-order 'inquiry into inquiry' allows Augustine to draw various conclusions about the nature of human rationality.⁷⁹ Among these is the fact that rational thought presupposes various norms, which are cognitive by the Academics' own standards, e.g. the disjunctive claim, "Zeno's definition is true or false."⁸⁰ With this, Augustine undermines the Academics' practice of arguing against the possibility of cognition. Nevertheless, he ends by suggesting a way forward which appears to him *probabile*, given this and other similar discoveries.⁸¹ With this final suggestion, Augustine

78 Bernd Reiner Voss, *Der Dialog* and Martin Claes, "Limitations," present the transition to *oratio perpetua* as marking a shift from reason to authority. See chapter 1 for discussion. Brian Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, sees this formal transition as marking a shift from 'outer dialogue,' i.e. between multiple individuals, to 'inner dialogue' as is found in *Sol.* Although this work is unfinished, all of Augustine's other dialogues, written both before and after it, end with a passage of *oratio perpetua* which functions differently than the debates leading up to it. Brian Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, brings together the debates that constitute *Sol.* and the *orationes* that conclude all of Augustine's complete dialogues under the general heading of 'inner dialogue.' This strikes me as dubious at best. See chapter 5 for discussion.

79 The terms 'first-order' and 'second-order' are my own. I invoke them to clarify what I take to be the all-important shift in Augustine's argument, as his text moves from inquiry into a given subject matter (first-order inquiry), to inquiry into the act of inquiry itself (second-order inquiry). Following recent conventions, we might think of the latter as 'meta-inquiry.' Augustine, so far as I can tell, lacks any equivalent expression. He comes close to one at *De Ord.* 2.38 where he describes dialectic as the '*disciplina disciplinarum*,' which "teaches how to teach and how to learn, in which Reason shows herself, what she is, what she wants, what she can do. She knows knowing..." (*Haec docet docere, haec docet discere; in hac se ipsa ratio demonstrat, atque aperit quae sit, quid uelit, quid ualeat. Scit scire...*). But I take dialectic to be merely one instance of second-order science: dialectic is a formal *discipline*, with its own methods and concerns; the second-order *inquiries* of Augustine's *orationes perpetuae* follow different methods and pursue different ends. See chapter 4 for discussion. We find a briefer, yet more fitting hint at *De quant. an.* 70: as Augustine shifts from debate into *oratio perpetua*, he claims to be untaught (*indoctus*) when it comes to the matters at hand, which he nevertheless proceeds to discuss, as someone "certain in his own experience of what he is capable of" (*quid ipse ualeam, securus experior*). See chapter 5.

80 In what follows, I will use the phrase 'cognitive norms' as shorthand for norms which may supply the content for cognitive impressions. The point of *C. Acad.* 3.21-29's list of such norms, I take it, is that they are employed by anyone engaged in rational thought, and that by thinking about such norms, anyone may form a cognitive impression. See discussion below.

81 Augustine first announces his intent to draw a *probabile* conclusion in *C. Acad.*'s second dedication to Romanianus, "And I will persuade you more easily of what I want, yet only to show it worthy of approval" (*tibi facile persuadebo quod uolo, probabiliter tamen, C. Acad.* 2.8). At *C. Acad.* 2.23 Augustine announces that the

appropriates to his own ends the Academic practice of using *probabilia* for practical matters. Academic practice thus serves a dual role in *C. Acad.*, as both the subject matter of the work's initial first-order debates, and (in its somewhat altered form) as the methodology guiding Augustine to his final endorsement of a non-Academic way forward. This progression from first-order debate to second-order reflection on debate is what makes up the dialectical drama of the dialogue.

The uses of history

C. Acad. presents two competing histories of the Academy. These invite the reader to view the work's debates from first- and second-order perspectives, in turn. The public history⁸² at *C. Acad.* 2.11-15 presents the development of the skeptical New Academy in a way that mirrors accounts given in Cicero's *Academica*.⁸³ In this first account, Augustine sets out how the Academics came to adopt their four characteristic practices. The founder of Stoicism, Zeno, begins this process – so the public history has it – by introducing his definition of the cognitive impression. The Old Academics⁸⁴ had never considered the matter, but once it had been

only difference between himself and the Academics is that “to them it seems worthy of approval that the truth cannot be found, but to me it seems worthy of approval that it can be” (*inter quos [Academicos] et me modo interim nihil distat, nisi quod illis probabile uisum est, non posse inueniri ueritatem; mihi autem inueniri posse probabile est*). Augustine declares his final victory at *C. Acad.* 3.30: “We are compelled to confess that it is much more worthy of approval that the Sage knows wisdom” (...*cogimur confiteri multo esse probabilius, sapientem scire sapientiam...*), and “now it is worthy of approval that the Sage knows something” (...*iam probabile est nonnihil scire sapientem*). Cf. *C. Acad.* 2.29-30, 3.5, 3.11-12.

82 The term, which I invoke to differentiate this account from the work's 'secret history,' is mine. See below.

83 The *Academica* in fact gives several different accounts. For the historical accuracy of *C. Acad.* 2's public history, and the question of what type of skepticism Augustine confronts in *C. Acad.*, see Eric Dubreucq, “Augustin et le scepticisme académicien,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 86/3 (1998): 335-365; Charles Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: the Last of the Academic Skeptics* (Oxford, 2001): 242-246; Giovanni Catapano, “Quale scetticismo viene criticato da Agostino nel *Contra Academicos*?” *Quaestio* 6 (2006): 1-13. Such concerns are important for deciding whether or not *C. Acad.*'s refutation of Academic skepticism succeeds on the Academics' own terms. At present, my interest is not in this question, but in how Augustine appropriates Academic argument and practice, particularly as represented by Cicero's dialogues, for his own project. Unless otherwise noted, I use 'Academics' to refer to Augustine's presentation rather than any historical figures.

84 It will suit our purposes to look at three main stages of the Academy. The Old Academy of Plato and his immediate successors subscribed to a positive body of doctrine, which we might think of as 'Platonic.' During the Hellenistic period, the skeptical New Academy argued against all claims to knowledge and advocated the

presented to them, they realized that cognition is in fact impossible and advocated withholding assent to all impressions. In response to the Stoics' *apraxia* argument, they then advocated the use of *probabilia* / *veri similia* for practical matters. In this way, the New Academy was born. Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression is at the heart of the matter, and given that the Academics accept it *in propria persona* and not merely as a dialectical move, it is a mitigated skepticism that they adopt.⁸⁵

The secret history⁸⁶ at *C. Acad.* 3.37-43 provides a quite different perspective on these events.⁸⁷ Zeno appears in this account long before his Stoic days, as a student at the (Old) Academy. Old Academic teaching, we are told, proceeded as a teacher constructed impassades out of his students' views as a means of concealing what he actually thought and of 'un-teaching' (*dedocere*) whatever harmful opinions his students may have carried with them. All this is done to prepare the student for the *mysteria* of Platonic doctrine. But for Zeno, the idea that all things are material proved too strong to remove; Zeno thus dropped out of the Academy and began his

withholding of assent. During the Imperial period, the 'Platonist' revival of Plotinus et al. returned to the positive doctrines of Plato. The transitions between these stages of the Academy's life are what matters for *C. Acad.* See *C. Acad.* 2.15 & 3.39-41 for further sub-divisions.

85 That is to say that they hold it to be true that cognition is impossible, as opposed to radical skeptics who adopt Zeno's criteria for merely dialectical purposes. See the introduction in Charles Brittain, trans. *Cicero: On Academic Skepticism* (Indianapolis, 2006).

86 The term 'secret history' is also mine. Augustine introduces this account as what he believes rather than knows (*non quid sciam sed quid existimem*) *C. Acad.* 3.37 and in *Ep.* 1.3 says refers to "what is at the end of *C. Acad.* 3 [as] perhaps more suspected than certain, yet nevertheless more useful than unbelievable..." (*quod in extremo tertii libri suspiciosius fortasse quam certius, utilius tamen, ut arbitror, quam incredibilius...*).

87 For the historical plausibility and possible sources for this secret history see Pierre Hadot, "Le *Contra Academicos* de saint Augustin et l'histoire de l'Académie," *École Pratique des Hautes Études, section 5: Sciences religieuses* 77 (1969): 291-295; Carlos Levy, "Scepticisme et dogmatisme dans l'Académie: 'l'ésotérisme' d'Arcésilas," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 56 (1979): 335-348; Therese Fuhrer, *Contra Academicos*, 403-405; Charles Brittain, *Philo*, 242-246. Emmanuel Bermon collects evidence for Augustine's own view of the secret history's accuracy and closes by suggesting that the secret history tells us less about the historic Academic skeptics and more about what Augustine himself is doing in *C. Acad.* Bermon does not elaborate on what this may amount to. The present study, in effect, picks up where Bermon leaves off. Whatever the source or sources of the secret history might be, I am interested in it only insofar as it functions *within C. Acad.* and may shed light on Augustine's own dialogues. Emmanuel Bermon, "'Contra Academicos vel De Academicis'" (*Retract.* I, 1): saint Augustin et les *Academica* de Cicéron," *Revue des Etudies Anciennes* 111/1 (2009): 75-93.

own Stoic school. When Zeno's materialist ideas started gaining popularity with the masses, the head of the Academy, Arcesilaus, was moved to pity and took on these masses as his charge.

Therefore, since Zeno was seduced by a certain perspective of his own about the world and especially about the soul, about which true philosophy is ever vigilant, saying that the soul is mortal and that nothing exists beyond this sensible world and that nothing can be accomplished in this world unless by a body – for he thought God himself to be fire – and since this evil spread far and wide, Arcesilaus seems to me most prudently and usefully to have hidden Academic doctrine even more deeply and buried it as though gold to be found by posterity. Therefore, since the common mob is more prone to rush into false opinions and because of the familiarity of bodies to believe more easily, but to their own detriment that all things are bodily, that most clear-sighted and humane man decided to un-teach those badly taught people, whom he endured, rather than teach those whom he did not deem teachable. And from this was born all those things that are attributed to the New Academy.

Quam ob rem cum Zeno sua quadam de mundo et maxime de anima, propter quam uera philosophia uigilat, sententia delectaretur dicens eam esse mortalem nec quidquam esse praeter hunc sensibilem mundum nihilque in eo agi nisi corpore – nam et Deum ipsum ignem putabat – prudentissime atque utilissime mihi uidetur Archesilas, cum illud late serperet malum, occultasse penitus Academiae sententiam et quasi aurum inueniendum quandoque posteris obruisse. Quare cum in falsas opiniones ruere turba sit pronior et consuetudine corporum omnia esse corporea facillime sed noxie credatur, instituit uir acutissimus atque humanissimus dedocere potius quos patiebatur male doctos quam docere quos dociles non arbitrabatur. Inde illa omnia nata sunt quae novae Academiae tribuuntur (C. Acad. 3.38).

In this way, Arcesilaus brought Old Academic practice onto the public stage, using Zeno's ideas to spin out impasses as a means of un-teaching materialism and concealing his own (Platonic) ideas about intelligible reality.⁸⁸ The results of this undertaking, to an external viewer, are the

88 As with the Academics, I will limit my discussion of the Stoics and Platonists to the presentation of them by Augustine in *C. Acad.* There we find two basic philosophical orientations. Materialists, such as the Stoics or Manichees (as Augustine understands them) hold that that everything that exists is material. Closely allied with this metaphysical position is a commitment to empiricism, i.e. the view that the bodily senses are the ultimate source of all thought. Intellectualists, such as the Platonists and Catholic Christians (again, as Augustine understands them), hold that not everything that exists is material: things such as God, and perhaps the rational soul, numbers, etc. exist but are not material; these immaterial realities exist in an 'intelligible' world, and serve as the ultimate object of at least some of our thoughts, i.e. the non-empirical ones. Augustine seems to assume a necessary correlation between empiricism and materialism, on the one hand, and intellectualism and the rejection of materialism on the other. From a historical perspective, such assumptions present at best a massive simplification of Stoicism and Platonism alike. That said, interpenetration of these issues remains controversial even today. For discussion, see Michael Frede, "The Stoic Notion of a *Lekton*," in *Language*, ed. Steven Everson (Cambridge, 1994): 109-128; Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* 5-7," in *Plato* (Oxford, 2000): vol. 1,

first three skeptical practices we have already seen, i.e. adopting Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression, arguing that cognition is impossible, and arguing that assent is always irrational; Augustine proceeds to credit Arcesilaus' successor, Carneades, with instituting the use of *probabilia*, which he drew “from the very fonts of Plato” (*ab ipsis enim Platonis fontibus*).⁸⁹

For the secret history, it is vital that in arguing against the possibility of cognition, Arcesilaus tacitly limits himself to Zeno's materialism and attacks only those impressions which ultimately derive from sensible experience of the material world. By contrast, impressions which ultimately derive their content from intelligible truths of Platonism do meet Zeno's criteria for being cognitive: they are true, they are brought about by the state of affairs they represent, i.e. the necessary truths of intelligible reality, and there is no other state of affairs that could bring about impressions with the same content.⁹⁰ Arcesilaus, as a Platonist, recognizes all this, and it is only by hiding his own views about this latter class of intellectual impressions that he can argue against the possibility of cognition. Yet there is a sense in which he hides his views in plain sight, since in the process of arguing that cognition is impossible, Arcesilaus *uses* cognitive norms of thought, whose origin he tacitly places in intelligible reality.

According to both histories, Zeno provides the impetus for the birth of the New Academy

pp. 215-246.

89 *C. Acad.* 3.40. Cf. Augustine's presentation of Plato's 'two-worlds' theory at *C. Acad.* 3.37: “For it is sufficient for my purposes [to say] that Plato thought that there were two worlds, the one intelligible, in which truth itself dwells, the other sensible, which we clearly perceive by sight and touch; the former is true, the latter is truth-like and made in its image; as a result, in a soul which knows itself, the truth about the intelligible world is refined and shines forth, so to speak, but in the souls of fools not knowledge but opinion about the sensible world can come to be; but whatever is done in this world, [is done] through what he called 'civic virtues' which are similar to the other 'true virtues,' which are known only by a few wise people, and thus these civic virtues can only be called the truth-like” (*Sat est enim ad id, quod uolo, Platonem sensisse duos esse mundos, unum intelligibilem, in quo ipsa ueritas habitaret, istum autem sensibilem, quem manifestum est nos uisu tactuque sentire; itaque illum uerum, hunc ueri similem et ad illius imaginem factum, et ideo de illo in ea quae se cognosceret anima uelut expoliri et quasi serenari ueritatem, de hoc autem in stultorum animis non scientiam sed opinionem posse generari; quidquid tamen ageretur in hoc mundo per eas uirtutes, quas ciuiles uocabat, aliarum uerarum uirtutum similes, quae nisi paucis sapientibus ignotae essent, non posse nisi ueri simile nominari*).

90 This argument is not without problems. See discussion below.

from the Old. On the first account, Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression is the crux of the issue, and by accepting it the Academics came to exchange Platonic doctrine for a mitigated skepticism.⁹¹ On the second account, the criteria set out in Zeno's definition pose no problem for Platonism, and it is Zeno's materialism that called for a change in Old Academic practice. This change was, however, superficial: none of Plato's doctrines was abandoned, and the Old Academics were for pedagogical reasons already in the habit of concealing their own views and arguing for conclusions they did not themselves endorse. The only innovation of the New Academics, according to the secret history, is the public sphere in which such practices came to be carried out.

The somewhat uninteresting orthodoxy of the public history has led scholars to pass it by as 'merely didactic.'⁹² The secret history's implausible suggestion of crypto-Platonist Academic skeptics, while sometimes treated with antiquarian interest,⁹³ is often dismissed as simply bizarre.⁹⁴ Yet we should not let such appraisals blind us to the role these two histories serve within the text of *C. Acad.* itself, particularly given the contrast between the bland orthodoxy of the one and the bizarre implausibility of the other. By articulating what that role is, we may begin to pull together the big project pursued in *C. Acad.*

The first thing to note is that Augustine's two histories are not on par. The events set out in the public history may be integrated into the secret history's account, i.e. as the public perspective on Arcesilaus' crypto-Platonist exploits, but not *vice versa*. Furthermore, given that

91 As Augustine concludes in his public history, "in this way the Academics appeared to take the impossibility of cognition from the Stoic Zeno's definition [of the cognitive impression]..." (*Sed uerum non posse comprehendere ex illa Stoici Zenonis definitione arripuisse uidebantur...*) *C. Acad.* 2.11.

92 Matthias Smalbrugge, "L'Argumentation Probabiliste."

93 Carlos Levy, "L'Ésotérisme" d'Arcésilas."

94 John Rist, "Certainty, belief and understanding," 47, claims that this "historical curiosity" plays no role in *C. Acad.*'s treatment of skepticism.

(according to the secret history) Arcesilaus took the public as his charge, these public and secret histories can be taken to describe the process of Platonist pedagogy from the perspective of the student and of the teacher, respectively. Given that a Platonist student studies by trying to unravel or 'refute' the impasses his teacher presents him,⁹⁵ *C. Acad.*'s two histories provide us two perspectives from which to consider the work's various attempts at 'refuting' the Academics' skeptical arguments.

The fruits of perplexity

Something like the public history's account of Academic skepticism is simply assumed at the start of *C. Acad.* 1, where Augustine's students Licentius and Trygetius argue respectively for and against the coherence of Arcesilaus' skeptical position.⁹⁶ Their assumptions about the Academics' skepticism are corroborated at the start of *C. Acad.* 2, where they are situated within the public history's narrative, which in turn prompts that book's debate over Carneades' use of *probabilia*. Augustine stresses that '*probabile*' and '*veri simile*' are merely alternative names for the same type of impression, and he argues that it is impossible for Carneades to identify *veri similia* while lacking any acquaintance with *vera*.⁹⁷ By the end of the book, all agree that the Academics' use of *probabilia* is problematic, but it is not clear what a viable alternative would be. Towards the end of these debates, Augustine suggests that the absurd consequences of the Academics' arguments may be taken as evidence that the Academics did not actually subscribe to

95 At least within Augustine's presentation of Platonist practice. For an account of the actual curriculum within the Platonist Academy in Augustine's time, see L. Westernik, et al., *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon*.

96 See *C. Acad.* 1.24-25 for Augustine's summary of the quite ambiguous outcome of this debate.

97 Augustine sets out his argument at *C. Acad.* 2.16 by way of an analogy: "If someone had seen your brother and claimed that he looked like his father, yet was unacquainted with your father himself, wouldn't such a person seem insane or simpleminded to you?" (*Si quisquam fratrem tuum visum patris tui similem esse affirmet ipsumque tuum patrem non nouerit, nonne tibi insanus aut ineptus uidebitur?*). This thought experiment is elaborated at *C. Acad.* 2.19 and provides material for the rest of *C. Acad.* 2's debate.

the views that they publicly endorsed.⁹⁸ Yet it is not until the secret history at the very end of *C. Acad.* 3 that Augustine reveals what the Academics' true commitments might have been. In suggesting this revisionist account, Augustine invites his interlocutors (and readers) to reevaluate everything that came before from the standpoint of a Platonist teacher, and to draw out the second-order consequences of *C. Acad.*'s first-order debates. The fact that *C. Acad.* 1 failed to reach any definitive conclusion can now be seen to result from the empiricist assumptions with which both Licentius and Trygetius undertook their debate.⁹⁹ Yet these young men unwittingly carried the solution with them all the while, insofar as both of them employed cognitive norms throughout the course of their debate.¹⁰⁰

98 “For I don't think [the Academics] were men who didn't know how to impose names on things, but they seem to me to have chosen these terms for the purpose of hiding their own view from slower people and making it manifest to those who were more vigilant. And I will set out how and why this appears so to me, once I have first discussed those things men think were said by them as though they were adverse to human cognition... For they seem to me to have been entirely serious and prudent men. But if there is anything which we will now be debating, it will be against those who believed that the Academics were adverse to the discovery of truth” (*non enim illos uiros eos fuisse arbitror, qui rebus nescirent nomina imponere, sed mihi haec uocabula uidetur elegisse et ad occultandam tardioribus et ad significandam uigilantioribus sententiam suam. Quod quare et quomodo mihi uideatur exponam, cum prius illa discussero, quae ab eis tanquam cognitionis humanae inimicis dicta homines putant... Nam illi mihi uidentur graues omnino ac prudentes uiri fuisse. Si quid est autem, quod nunc disputabimus, aduersus eos erit, qui Academicos inuentioni ueritatis aduersos fuisse crediderunt, C. Acad. 2.24*). This 'prudence' of the Academics is invoked again at *C. Acad.* 3.36: having reduced the Academics' use of *probabilia* to a laughable absurdity, Augustine asks somewhat rhetorically how the Academics themselves had not foreseen such results. He answers that they did, “most cleverly and prudently” (*Immo solertissime prudentissimeque uiderunt*). The secret history follows immediately as a kind of 'error theory' explaining how these prudent Academics could come to endorse such ridiculous views in public. Within the secret history itself, Arcesilaus is said “most prudently” (*prudentissime*) to have hidden the views of the Academy (*C. Acad.* 3.38).

99 With this, Augustine grants (the historical) Arcesilaus a circumscribed victory, insofar as he grants that his various skeptical arguments invoking dreams, madness and the like actually do undermine the possibility of empirically-based cognition.

100 At *C. Acad.* 1.9 Licentius has made some progress in realizing this, as he declares, himself “[to] think that only God knows the Truth itself and perhaps the human soul once it has left behind this shadowy prison, which is the body” (*Veritatem autem illam solum Deum nosse arbitror aut forte hominis animam, cum hoc corpus, hoc est tenebrosum carcerem, dereliquerit*). Licentius has progressed from one Academic perspective, i.e. thinking that human beings cannot attain knowledge (or cognition) to thinking that they might be able to do so, provided that they use some non-bodily means. This too Licentius presents as an Academic position. What he has not yet discovered is the Platonist perspective that human beings generally, and most importantly he himself, have access to intelligible reality *even while embodied*. From the perspective of *C. Acad.*'s crypto-Platonist curriculum, Licentius has cracked the Academics' skeptical facade, but he has not yet discovered what sits behind. In having Licentius move between these positions, Augustine, as author, seems to be working through different Academic conceptions of the afterlife. Two contradictory accounts from Cicero's *Hortensius* are preserved by Augustine himself: Frg. 97 (Müller), preserved at *De Trin.* 14.26, echoes the end of Plato's *Apology*

Augustine makes this final point, albeit somewhat obliquely, in the *oratio perpetua* that ends the work. Augustine imagines Arcesilaus to be present and allows his companions to 'listen in' as he attempts to trap the father of Academic skepticism in a series of dilemmas.¹⁰¹ The passage in full is as follows.

But let us discuss Zeno's definition, insofar as we fools are able. For Zeno said that the impression that can be grasped appears in a way that a false impression can not appear. For it is clear that nothing else can enter into cognition. "I see things this way too," says Arcesilaus, "and it is through this definition that I teach that nothing is grasped. For nothing of such a sort can be found." [A] Perhaps by you and other fools, but why is the Sage not able to do so? Yet I judge that you would be unable to respond to even the fool himself, if he should tell you to to use that famous shrewdness of yours to refute Zeno's definition and show it to be false; but if you are not able to do this, then you have this definition itself as something you may grasp, yet if you do refute it, you no longer have it as a means of impeding cognition. I don't see how it can be refuted, and I judge it to be most true. And thus when I know it, though I am a fool, I know something. [B] But let this definition give way to your cunning. I will use a most secure dilemma. Zeno's definition is either true or false. If it is true, I win; if it is false, an impression can be grasped even if it has signs in common with a false impression. "But how's that possible?" he exclaimed. Therefore Zeno defined most truly, and no one who agreed with him in this regard erred. Or will we consider this definition to be of little worth or merit, which in opposition to those who had many things to say against cognition, in the process of describing what and what kind of thing can be an object of perception, showed itself to be just such a thing? Thus it is both a definition and an example of cognitive impressions. [C] "Whether or not the definition is true," says Arcesilaus, "I don't know. But because it is worthy of approval, by following it I show that there is nothing such that it can be grasped." Perhaps you show that there is nothing beyond the definition that can be an object of perception, and I imagine you see what follows from that. But even if we are uncertain of the definition, knowledge does not abandon us. For we know that Zeno's definition is true or false, and thus we know something. [D] Yet it won't come about that I am ungrateful, and thus I judge this definition to be most true. For either false impressions can be grasped – which eventuality the Academics fear and is in fact absurd – or those impressions which are similar to false ones can be; therefore the definition is true. But let us now look into other matters.

40c4-41c7 in claiming that the one may continue *inquiring* after the truth in the afterlife. Frg. 50 (Müller), preserved at *De Trin.* 14.12, by contrast claims that like the gods we will be happy in having *attained* the truth (*cognitione naturae et scientia*). The fragmentary remains of the *Hortensius* make it impossible to be certain whether Cicero ascribed either view to the Academic skeptics themselves, and thus these fragments make poor evidence either for or against thinking that Licentius has departed from normal skeptical Academic theses. For a discussion of the place of these fragments in *De Trin.*, see Goulven Madec, "L'Hortensius de Cicéro dans les livres XIII-XIV de *De Trinitate*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 15 (1969): 167-73.

101 The device, prosopopoeia, is most famously employed in Socrates' conversation with the Laws (*Crito* 50a-54d).

Tamen quod Zeno definiuit, quantum stulti possumus, discutiamus. Id uisum ait posse comprehendendi, quod sic appareret, ut falsum apparere non posset. Manifestum est nihil aliud in perceptionem uenire. Hoc et ego, inquit Archesilas, uideo et hoc ipso doceo nihil percipi. Non enim tale aliquid inueniri potest. [A] Fortasse abs te atque ab aliis stultis; at a sapiente cur non potest? Quamquam et ipsi stulto nihil responderi posse arbitror, si tibi dicat, ut illo memorabili acumine tuo hanc ipsam Zenonis definitionem refellas et ostendas eam etiam falsam esse posse; quod si non potueris, hanc ipsam quam percipias habes, si autem refelleris, unde a percipiendo impediaris non habes. Ego eam refelli posse non uideo et omnino uerissimam iudico. Itaque cum eam scio, quamuis sim stultus, nonnihil scio. [B] Sed fac illam cedere uersutiae tuae. Vtar complexione securissima. Aut enim uera est aut falsa. Si uera, bene teneo; si falsa, potest aliquid percipi, etiamsi habeat communia signa cum falso. Vnde, inquit, potest? Verissime igitur Zeno definiuit nec ei quisquis uel in hoc consensit, errauit. An paruae laudis et sinceritatis definitionem putabimus, quae contra eos, qui erant aduersum perceptionem multa dicturi, cum designaret quale esset quod percipi posset, se ipsam talem esse monstrauit? Ita comprehensibilibus rebus et definitio est et exemplum. [C] Vtrum, ait, etiam ipsa uera sit nescio; sed quia est probabilis, ideo eam sequens ostendo nihil esse tale, quale illa expressit posse comprehendendi. Ostendis fortasse praeter ipsam, et uides, ut arbitror, quid sequatur. Quodsi etiam eius incerti sumus, nec ita nos deserit scientia. Scimus enim aut ueram esse aut falsam; non igitur nihil scimus. [D] Quamquam numquam efficiet, ut ingratus sim, prorsus ego illam definitionem uerissimam iudico. Aut enim possunt percipi et falsa, quod uehementius Academici timent et re uera absurdum est, aut nec ea possunt, quae sunt falsis similia; unde illa definitio uera est. Sed iam caetera uideamus (C. Acad. 3.21).

This passage presents not one but three different dilemmas, which I have labeled (A), (B) and (D). Blake Dutton differentiates between them and attempts to present each as a sound argument. In the end, he concludes that Augustine merely came close.¹⁰² Yet by presenting these dilemmas, however flawed they may be, Augustine engages Arcesilaus in rational debate. And having done so, Augustine may point out, as he does at (C), that Arcesilaus himself, in the process of arguing that cognition is impossible, makes use of disjunctions such as “Zeno's definition is true or false.” This disjunctive claim is true regardless of which of its disjuncts ends up being true. It is therefore certain by Arcesilaus' own standards, and thus it supplies the content for a cognitive

¹⁰² Blake Dutton, “Augustine, Academic Skepticism, and Zeno’s Definition.” For a similar appraisal see Christopher Kirwan, “Against the Skeptics.”

impression. This, finally, suffices to undermine the skeptical claim that cognition is impossible.¹⁰³

Augustine declares this discovery sufficient to undermine Arcesilaus' arguments against the possibility of cognition.¹⁰⁴ Yet there is nothing special about the particular disjunction Augustine cites, and he proceeds to list other instances of cognitive norms which would be employed by anyone inquiring into any of the three branches of philosophy.¹⁰⁵ The cumulative point is that cognition, far from being impossible to attain, is in fact ubiquitous, inasmuch as cognitive norms are presupposed by most if not all acts of rational inquiry. This is the truth that Arcesilaus, as a Platonist teacher, hid in plain sight as he made use of cognitive norms to argue that cognition is impossible; and it is by catching the self-contradiction implicit in this that the student advances in Arcesilaus' Platonist curriculum.

An anti-Empiricist argument

According to the secret history, it was Zeno's materialism that Arcesilaus set out to un-teach. At this point, we can piece together the basic shape of his argument. Zeno's certainty criterion is adopted: for any impression which represents a state of affairs, if it is possible for another impression to have the same content but be brought about by a different state of affairs, then the initial impression cannot be grasped. From this, Arcesilaus argues that for any empirical impression, another impression could have been brought about by a state other than the one it represents, e.g. even if I actually am in Athens, and it appears to me that I am in Athens, it is nevertheless *possible* that I am dreaming and actually in Citium; by Zeno's standards, this is enough to render my true impression incognitive. Such is the case for any empirical impression.

Yet through reflection on the act of inquiry, Arcesilaus' student is brought to realize that various

103 Cf. Charles Brittain, *Philo*, 165-6, who takes the purpose of this passage to demonstrate that Zeno's definition is a possible object of cognition.

104 *C. Acad.* 2.22.

105 Physics (*C. Acad.* 3.23-6), ethics (*C. Acad.* 3.27-8) and logic (*C. Acad.* 3.29).

norms are presupposed by rational thought, and that impressions of these could not be brought about by another state of affairs: the disjunctive claim, “Zeno's definition is true or false” is true, and there is no state of affairs in which it is not true, that could give rise to this impression. Impressions of the norms of thought are thus cognitive.¹⁰⁶ Since no empirical impression is cognitive, such impressions must have a source which is ultimately non-empirical, and thus *contra Zenonem*, it follows that there must be some non-empirical source of cognition.

Having set out his first candidate cognitive impression, “Zeno's definition is true or false,” Augustine proceeds to lay out a motley assortment of further candidates, e.g. “if there are four elements, then there are not five elements,” “ $3 \times 3 = 9$ ” and “this appears white to me.”¹⁰⁷ Even scholars who will accept the cognitive status of some of these are still quick to point out the trivial nature of these truths, which fall far short of the wisdom whose attainment is what *C. Acad.* is ultimately interested in. Such criticisms miss the place these cognitive impressions occupy within *C. Acad.*'s broader constructive argument. At this point, it is not the Sage's

¹⁰⁶ It is not completely clear how common such impressions are meant to be. Augustine's argument focuses on Zeno's third criterion, the certainty requirement: impressions of necessary truths cannot be brought about by states of affairs other than the ones they represent, for the simple reason that there are no states of affairs in which necessary truths do not obtain. That said, it seems quite possible that an impression representing such a necessary truth, could be formed *not* through intellectual perception of that truth itself, but simply by one person's listening to another talking about such matters. In this case, the impression formed meets Zeno's first and third criteria, but fails to meet the second. In terms of the Platonist argument that *C. Acad.* attributes to Arcesilaus, this would mean that day-to-day use of rational norms does not necessarily assume impressions that are already cognitive. Still, the use of such norms would provide an occasion for individuals to reflect on their own rational activities, and thus exercise their intellectual capacities by forming new impressions through direct perception of the intellectual realities from which these norms ultimately derive. If this is right, then by undertaking the reflections on rational activity advocated within the Cassiciacum dialogues, an individual can improve his epistemic state not only by discerning which impressions to assent to, but by acquiring new and improved impressions, which are cognitive and derived from the intelligible world itself. In any event, the question of how human beings typically acquire the norms of thought is not broached in these works.

¹⁰⁷ While Augustine claims that all such impressions are certain, he does not address the further question of why this is so. Disjunctions, mathematical truths and other logical necessities are all always true. In the case of impressions such as 'I exist' and 'I live,' the state of affairs described by the impression is a necessary condition of the impression's being formed. First-person statements of subjective states, e.g. I have the impression of a table, ultimately rely on substantive psychological views about the mind's transparency to itself. It will suit our present purposes to focus on timelessly true rational norms. For a critique of the cognitive status of such impressions, see Christopher Kirwan, “Against the Sceptics;” Therese Fuhrer, “Skeptizismus und Subjektivität;” Gareth Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, and *Augustine*, 15-22.

wisdom that is at stake, but the basic prerequisites of human rationality. Augustine's cognitive impressions are not meant to constitute the wisdom attained at the end of philosophical inquiry, neither are they axioms or first principles from which the contents of wisdom may be derived.¹⁰⁸ They are the prerequisite tools of reasoning that make philosophical inquiry possible, and this is the way in which these impressions 'pertain to' the three divisions of philosophy.¹⁰⁹

Augustine's anti-empiricist argument engages the Hellenistic discussion of the common concepts. Within Stoic theory, human beings, simply by being placed in the world, naturally develop a set of cognitive impressions, which make rational thought possible and thus separate human beings from brute animals.¹¹⁰ When Augustine invokes Arcesilaus' critique of empiricism, the real issue is not whether this or that impression is cognitive, e.g. whether we can be certain that the oar in front of us is straight or bent; rather, by using Arcesilaus' arguments to cast doubt on empirical impressions as a class, Augustine casts doubt on the Stoics' empirically obtained common concepts. By the Stoics' own account, such doubt is sufficient to render incognitive the basis of human rationality itself.¹¹¹ This much is enough to arrive at skepticism, as the public

108 Cf. Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*.

109 Augustine addresses this claim at *C. Acad.* 3.23 to the (quite dead) Academic skeptic, Carneades who, “say[s] that nothing can be grasped in philosophy” (*Nihil ais in philosophia posse percipi*). This position had already been set out in the public history at *C. Acad.* 2.11: “For the Academics thought that knowledge could not come to a human being, at least when it comes to knowledge of things pertaining to philosophy, for Carneades said that he didn't care about other things” (*Nam et Academicis placuit nec homini scientiam posse contingere earum duntaxat rerum, quae ad philosophiam pertinent.*). I invoke the larger dialectical movement at work in *C. Acad.* and argue that the things pertaining to philosophy, which Augustine presents as certain, are merely those impressions which one uses to carry out philosophical inquiries. This is most obvious for what I am calling 'norms of thought.' Yet first-person statements also have their role in ethical and psychological inquiries, e.g. *C. Acad.* 3.1-4 where Augustine and Alypius debate whether we want life for the sake of wisdom or wisdom for the sake of living. Later on, the trio of first-person cognitive impressions, “I exist,” “I am alive,” and “I think” provide the principle from which the grand speculations of *De lib. arbit.* depart. See Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will* for discussion.

110 While the mechanism through which humans acquire these concepts may be innate, according to the Stoics, actual concepts such as 'the good' and the principle of bivalence are arrived at through empirical means. See Dirk Obbink, “‘What all men believe must be true’: common conceptions and *consensio omnium*,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1992) 193-231; Charles Brittain, “Common sense: concepts, definitions and meaning in and out of the Stoa,” in *Language and Learning*, ed. D. Frede & B. Inwood (Cambridge, 2005): 165-209.

111 We find such an argument at Cicero, *Academica* 2.26.

history's Arcesilaus has done. Yet Augustine goes further, and by suggesting a non-empirical source for the common concepts, he offers a Platonist resolution to a Hellenistic debate.¹¹²

A *probabile* solution

What has Augustine accomplished with this argument? In the end, he uses it to suggest that the rational way forward sits neither with Academic skepticism nor Stoic empiricism, but with the intellectualism of the Platonists. In order for Augustine to show the certain truth of this conclusion, he would have to establish that the views of these three schools *exhaust* all possible explanations for human access to the common concepts. This would bring *C. Acad.*'s overarching argument in line with a strategy developed in Hellenistic debates over the human end.¹¹³ At the end of the secret history, Augustine claims that in his day, the Stoics have died out, the Platonists and Peripatetics agree with one another, while people become Cynics simply for the *libertas atque licentia* it affords.¹¹⁴ Yet in this Augustine does not even pretend to have exhausted all possible positions; he has merely taken stock of the options available to him and chosen the one that escapes the skeptics' attacks unscathed. This is all Augustine claims. His big conclusion, that wisdom can be found with the Platonists, is presented not as something certain to be true, but merely something that, *contra Academicos*, strikes Augustine as *probabile*. Some scholars have seen Augustine as unduly modest or otherwise disingenuous in the way he sets out this

112 In terms of the actual history of Platonism, it may be that Augustine has borrowed his main line of argument, directly or indirectly, from Plotinus. We find nearly the same argument in *Enneads* 5.3.1-5 & 5.5.1-2, but without explicit reference to the Stoic/Academic pedigree of Plotinus' working premises. Augustine makes this pedigree explicit, attributes a Platonist project to the skeptics themselves, and spins out a story of skeptical crypto-Platonism. Dominic O'Meara points out the similarity of Plotinus' argument to one found at *C. Acad.* 3.22-6. Dominic O'Meara, "Scepticism and Ineffability in Plotinus," *Phronesis* 45/3 (2000): 241-242. On my reading, it is a version of Plotinus' argument that drives the work's dialectic at the most basic level. For discussion of this argument in Plotinus, see also Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, "Cognition and its object," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge, 1996): 217-249; R. T. Wallis, "Skepticism and Neoplatonism," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 36/2 (1987): 911-954.

113 See Keimpe Algra, "Chrysippus, Carneades, Cicero: The Ethical *Divisiones* in Cicero's *Lucullus*," in *Assent and Argument*, ed. Brad Inwood & Jaap Mansfeld (Leiden, 1997): 107-139.

114 *C. Acad.* 2.42.

conclusion.¹¹⁵ I take Augustine's claims at face value, for the simple reason that the arguments he deploys in *C. Acad.* support conclusions at the level of assurance that Augustine explicitly claims for them. To see this, we must turn to Augustine's discussion of Carneades' *probabilia*.

C. Acad. 2's debate amounts to an evaluation of a simple argument. If, as Cicero testified to, a *veri simile* impression is simply a *probabile* impression under a different description,¹¹⁶ then an Academic skeptic such as Carneades, insofar as he refuses to assent to any impression as *verum*, is not in a position to approve of any other impression as *veri simile*, for the simple reason that he has no basis to identify such an impression. Scholars take this to be one of *C. Acad.*'s refutations of Academic skepticism, although not all are equally convinced of its success.¹¹⁷ Rather than weigh in on the success or failure of Augustine's argument, I call into question the more basic assumption that its purpose (or at least its sole purpose) is to refute Academic skepticism. All the argument attempts to show is that the Academic practice of refusing to assent to any impression as true is incompatible with the other Academic practice of using *probabile* impressions for practical matters. Yet it does not follow that a non-Academic cannot use *probabile* impressions. And we find Augustine doing just this at the end of *C. Acad.*, even *after* he has assented to the truth of various cognitive impressions.

There is little doubt that Augustine endorses Platonism and Catholic Christianity in the

115 Emmanuel Bermon, "Augustin et les *Academica*," for instance, claims that Augustine does not merely hold it to be true that wisdom can be found, but that he himself has actually found it, although he veils his conclusions in terms of *stultitia* so that his students will not be overcome by his authority as a teacher. See also Michael Foley, "Cicero and Augustine."

116 *C. Acad.* 2.26 preserves Cicero's *Academica* frg. 19 (Müller): "All things, the Academic said, which I thought should be called worthy of approval or truth-like, appear to me to be such. And if you want to call them by another name, I won't offer any resistance. For it is enough for me that you have accepted well what I'm saying, i.e. the things onto which I impose these names. For the wise man ought to be not a coiner of terms but an investigator of things" (*Talia*, inquit Academicus, *mihi uidentur omnia, quae probabilia uel ueri similia putau nominanda; quae tu si alio nomine uis uocare, nihil repugno. Satis enim mihi est, te iam bene accepisse quid dicam, id est quibus rebus haec nomina imponam. Non enim uocabulorum opificem, sed rerum inquisitorem decet esse sapientem*).

117 For discussion, see Cristopher Kirwan, "Against the Skeptics;" Therese Fuhrer, "Das Kriterium der Wahrheit."

end;¹¹⁸ the question is how he gets there *in this text*, what the implications of this process are, and what purpose is served by such a process in the first place. I've argued that Augustine follows the Academics in using *probabile* impressions in conditions of uncertainty. While this uncertainty is global for the Academics, Augustine argues that one can use *probabile* impressions only when one is certain of some things and uncertain about others. Yet it is still unclear how the various parts of Augustine's constructive case are meant to fit together. For this, we need a fuller picture of the psychological theory underlying these epistemological arguments.

Changing our perception

Academic ideas about the *probabile* are rooted in Stoic psychology, in particular the Stoics' theory of perception. Three basic components of this theory are relevant to piecing together Augustine's project in *C. Acad.* First, for normal human adults, all perception involves propositional content: vision is not the passive messenger of shapes and colors, but a function of the rational soul, which actively interprets such data as an integral part of the perceptual act itself, forming an impression with propositional content (which may be true or false) and judging it worthy of approval (*probabile*) or not. The second thing to note is that perception occurs through a series of stages. An initial impression is formed by the mind and stamped worthy of approval or not, through a more-or-less autonomous process; once this has occurred, we are presented with a choice: we may assent to this impression as true, and thus integrate it into our body of assents,¹¹⁹ or we may withhold our assent. The third thing to note is that it is our body of prior assents that guides the initial formation of new impressions. It is the common concepts that make this possible: as the foundations of human rationality, they provide the basic categories

118 The clearest statement of this comes *C. Acad.* 3.43. See discussion below.

119 By 'assents,' I mean the general category of impressions that we take to be true. This may include impressions that are true or false, certain or uncertain, cognitive or incognitive.

through which human perception is structured. Yet it is not merely the common concepts but the whole body of one's prior assents that conditions how he perceives the world. In an ideal situation, these additional assents are all to cognitive impressions, and include the set of impressions constitutive of wisdom. In actual human civilization, an individual will likely assent to all manner of false and incognitive impressions and thus come to perceive incorrectly, as his mind forms impressions whose propositional content is false, e.g. thinking that pleasure is good, that pain is evil, etc.¹²⁰

Given this basic setup, it is impossible for me to change how my *current* impressions are formed: my prior assents dictate how this first stage will be carried out, and the only choice I have is to assent or not. Yet through assenting and refusing to assent to certain impressions, I can change my overall body of assents, and thus change how my mind will form *subsequent* impressions. With this we have the psychological underpinnings of Augustine's method. Aporetic debates confront us with problematic impressions, born of everyday experience, and give us good reason to withhold, or more precisely withdraw, our assent to them. Reflection on our rational activities supplies us with new impressions and gives us reason to assent to them. By altering our body of assents in this way, we change how we form initial impressions, what our mind stamps as *probabile* and what not. This, in turn, puts us in a state to think fruitfully about the grand accounts that close each work.

This process does not get us all the way to understanding or, in *C. Acad.*'s terms, to cognition of Augustine's final accounts. Yet it does get us closer. From a purely practical perspective, the person who perceives Augustine's intellectualist accounts as *probabile*, is more likely to carry on inquiries through which he might eventually grasp them. From an epistemic

¹²⁰ See Seneca, *Epistle* 90 for one Stoic account of the fall from the Golden Age.

perspective, this process makes our current beliefs compatible with these intellectualist accounts. *Vera* such as 'even non-sages (*stulti*) grasp norms of rational thought' hardly demonstrate the certain truth of *veri simile* / *probabile* conclusions such as, 'the Sage grasps wisdom.' Yet the discovery of the non-sage's cognition provides some reason, *ceteris paribus*, for rejecting the skeptical idea that the Sage's wisdom consists not in cognition but in the perfect searching for the Truth. As Augustine puts it, the only thing holding him back from assenting to the possibility of grasping wisdom was the Academics' arguments against the possibility of cognition;¹²¹ with these arguments overturned, he is justified in finding it *probabile* that the Sage grasps wisdom, while he is further justified in finding *probabile* the Platonists' account of why this may be so, given that *C. Acad.* 1's attempt to secure cognition on empiricist terms failed.

The propaedeutic function of *C. Acad.*

In his secret history of the Academy, Augustine tells us that disclosure of Plato's central doctrines to the uninitiated was nothing short of sacrilege, a grave sin and of little use to people who are not prepared to understand such ideas.¹²² Philosophical purification is needed before one can approach such teachings, and Augustine presents the Platonist curriculum as a process not of learning principles, but of reorienting the student.¹²³ In theory, this process is adapted to the

121 "But there is nothing further that I desire, if it is now worthy of approval that the wise person knows something. For the only reason it seemed truth-like that he ought to hold back assent is that it was truth-like that nothing could be grasped. But with this removed (for the wise person grasps wisdom, as is now conceded) no reason now remains why the wise person would not assent certainly to wisdom itself" (*Quid autem amplius desiderem, nihil habeo, si iam probabile est nonnihil scire sapientem. Non enim alia causa ueri simile uidebatur eum assensionem sustinere debere, nisi quia erat ueri simile nihil posse comprehendere. Quo sublato – percipit enim sapiens uel ipsam, ut iam conceditur, sapientiam – nulla iam causa remanebit, cur non assentiatur sapiens uel ipsi sapientiae, C. Acad. 3.30*).

122 "Among Plato's successors, these and other such matters appear to have been preserved and guarded as mysteries. For these things are not easily grasped, except by those who by purifying themselves from all vices assume a certain habit that is more than human, and a person who knows these things sins gravely when he wants to teach them to just anybody" (*Haec et alia huius modi mihi uidentur inter successores eius [Platonis], quantum poterant, esse seruata et pro mysteriis custodita. Non enim aut facile ista percipiuntur nisi ab eis, qui se ab omnibus uitiis mundantes in aliam quamdam plus quam humanam consuetudinem uindicauerint, aut non grauiter peccat, quisquis ea sciens quoslibet homines docere uoluerit, C. Acad. 3.38*).

123 Catapano uses *C. Acad.* 1's various discussions to piece together a conception of philosophy of conversion and

particular needs of each individual student. In practice, various materialistic views of the world are what most students must be 'un-taught.' The spread of Stoicism is partly to blame for the ubiquity of materialist notions, yet Zeno's materialist ideas gained popularity because 'the familiarity with bodies' (*consetudo corporum*) made people prone to assent to such false opinions in the first place.¹²⁴ This 'familiarity' refers to things that we are simply 'used to,' though it also has an amorous or even sexual sense. These two meanings are brought together in *C. Acad.*'s two dedications, which lay out *C. Acad.*'s basic strategy *in nuce*.¹²⁵

Augustine dedicates the work to his benefactor and fellow north African, Romanianus. While still a Manichee, Augustine had led Romanianus to join the sect which, in *C. Acad.*, he refers to simply as *illa superstitio*.¹²⁶ Now that Augustine has abandoned the Manichees, he is concerned to get Romanianus to follow his lead once again, and *C. Acad.* functions as a palinode against Augustine's still recent Manichee past. Augustine begins his case by listing various material pleasures and honors, which he claims make men miserable;¹²⁷ he proceeds to suggest

purification. Giovanni Catapano, "In philosophiae gremium confugere: Augustine's View of Philosophy in the First Book of his *Contra Academicos*," *Dionysius* 18 (2000): 45-68. Kolbet helpfully situates Augustine within classical notions of philosophy as therapy for the soul. Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls* (Notre Dame, 2010). For the presence of protreptic themes within *C. Acad.*, see Pierre Valentin, "Protreptique;" Sophie Van der Meeren, "La sagesse "droit chemin de la vie": une métaphore du *Contra Academicos* relue à la lumière du protreptique philosophique," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 53 (2007): 81-111. Generic classification of the protreptic genre is notoriously difficult; see Mark D. Jordan, "Ancient Philosophical Protreptic and the Problem of Persuasive Genres," *Rhetorica* 4/4 (1986): 309-333; S. R. Slings, "Protreptic in Ancient Theories of Philosophical Literature," in *Greek Literary Theory after Aristotle*, ed. J. G. J. Abbenes, S. R. Slings & I. Sluiter (Amsterdam, 1995): 173-192. My current goal is not to argue that part or all of *C. Acad.* belongs to one sub-genre or another. While the description of *C. Acad.*'s overall structure has much in common with the protreptic genre, my goal is to understand how *C. Acad.* works. What's more, I argue that *De beata v.*, *De ord.* and all of Augustine's later dialogues work in roughly the same way. Whether or not that places all of Augustine's dialogues within the protreptic sub-genre is beyond my current concerns.

124 *C. Acad.* 3.38

125 *C. Acad.* 1.1-4, 2.1-9. For discussion on the literary and philosophical sources of these two dedications, see Karin Schlapbach, "Ciceronisches und Neoplatonisches in den Proömien von Augustin, *Contra Academicos* 1 und 2," in *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike*, ed. T. Fuhrer & M. Ehler (Stuttgart, 1999): 139-51.

126 *C. Acad.* 1.3.

127 *C. Acad.* 1.2.

that philosophy may free one from such things, by teaching that nothing should be worshiped which can be perceived by the bodily senses.¹²⁸ If we take this opening suggestion with the secret history's closing discussion of the *consuetudo corporum*, we find Augustine identifying a moral failure (valuing material goods) as the cause of an intellectual failure (thinking that only material things exist).¹²⁹ Augustine takes stock of Romanianus' moral progress in this regard, and he uses the same account of the moral/intellectual dangers of materialism to frame his own recent choices: in committing himself to Platonist philosophy and Catholic faith, Augustine left behind both Manicheism and a career in rhetoric, the *uentosa professio* that praises material goods.¹³⁰

The work's second dedication spells out the implications of the intellectual failure of materialism.

But because of the manifold tribulations of this life, Romaninus, as you judge in your own life, or a certain mental stupor, laziness, or slowness of sluggish [minds], either [i] by despair of finding truth (for the star of wisdom does not rise before minds with the same ease as this [visible] light rises before our eyes) or [ii] by the false opinion that one has already found the truth, which is the mistake of all peoples, it comes about that people do not inquire after the truth diligently, if they inquire at all, and they are turned away from wanting to inquire, and as a result, knowledge seldom comes to human beings, and then only to the few. And for this reason, the Academics' weapons, when it comes to hand-to-hand combat with them, not only with middling men but with clear-sighted and well educated opponents, seem to be invincible and fashioned by Vulcan, as it were.

Sed quia siue uitae huius multis uariisque iactationibus, Romaniane, ut in eodem te probas, siue ingeniorum quodam stupore, uel socordia uel tarditate torpentium, siue desperatione inueniendi – quia non quam facile oculis ista lux, tam facile mentibus sapientiae sidus oboritur – siue etiam, qui error omnium populorum est, falsa opinione inuentae a se ueritatis nec diligenter homines quaerunt, si qui quaerunt, et a quaerendi uoluntate auertuntur, euenit, ut scientia raro paucisque proueniat, eoque fit, ut Academicorum arma, quando cum eis ad manus uenitur, nec mediocribus uiris sed acutis et bene eruditis inuicta et quasi uulcania uideantur (C. Acad. 2.1).

128 ...docet nihil omnino colendum esse totumque contemni oportere, quicquid mortalibus oculis cernitur, quicquid ullus sensus attingit (C. Acad. 1.3).

129 This failure is 'intellectual' both in the broad sense of 'thinking false things' and in the more narrow sense of 'thinking the wrong things about intelligible reality,' although if we accept Platonism, the two failings coincide.

130 C. Acad. 1.3.

Since intelligible light is harder to see than physical light (particularly given the *consuetudo corporum*), many people grow weary of searching for the truth and eventually despair of ever finding it (*desperare inueniendi*); alternatively, the same familiarity with bodies may lead people to suppose falsely that they have already found the truth and thus stop looking for it. This second state Augustine later identifies as *superstitio*.¹³¹ Materialism as an intellectual failure thus derails the inquiry after truth either through superstition or through despair. Having analyzed this set of problems, Augustine could proceed by treating the symptoms, and it is normally assumed that the goal of *C. Acad.* is to undermine despair by attacking Academic skepticism from every angle imaginable, while *superstitio* is addressed through a similar barrage of anti-Manichee arguments in his later *De uera religione*. Yet *C. Acad.* addresses the cause of these problems as well. This attack on materialism is *C. Acad.*'s more basic project. Through it, Augustine sets out to reorient those like Romanianus who perceive the world as just so much matter and to help them recognize their own place within intelligible reality.

An argument for faith

C. Acad.'s second dedication ends as Augustine advises Romanianus not to judge himself to know anything, unless he is as certain of it as he is that $1+2+3+4=10$, and at the same time not to despair of ever grasping the truth in philosophy but rather to trust (*credite*) Him who said, “seek and ye shall find.”¹³² These seemingly contradictory instructions bring faith and philosophy into some sort of relation. We learn more at the end of the *oratio perpetua*, where Augustine claims to be led on by the dual weight of authority and reason (*gemino pondere... auctoritatis*

¹³¹ *C. Acad.* 2.8.

¹³² ...cauete, ne quid uos nosse arbitremini, nisi quod ita didiceritis saltem, ut nostis unum duo tria quatuor simul collecta in summam fieri decem. Sed item cauete, ne uos in philosophia ueritatem aut non cognituros, aut nullo modo ita posse cognosci arbitremini. Nam mihi credite, uel potius illi credite, qui ait Quaerite et inuenietis (Matthew 7:7), nec cognitionem desperandam esse et manifestiorem futuram, quam sunt illi numeri.

atque rationis), which he associates with Christ and the Platonists, respectively.¹³³ Taking these two passages together, we might be tempted to find a one-to-one relation between their dichotomies: the reason of the Platonists counters superstition by teaching us not to count anything uncertain as known, while the authority of Christ keeps us from falling into despair by giving us something to believe in. Yet *C. Acad.* explicitly speaks of the weight of Platonist *authority*, and ends as Augustine claims to *trust (confido)* that it is with the Platonists that understanding is to be found. These textual points suggest that *C. Acad.* makes *faith* in authority part of the Platonists' *philosophical* method.¹³⁴ We may see that this is so if we turn to Augustine's second discussion of *probabilia*.

Two aspects of Academic *probabilia* are important for *C. Acad.*'s constructive case. We have already discussed their role in perception. The second thing to note is their role as an alternative to assent for matters of action. Within the Stoic-Academic debate, *probabile* impressions were originally invoked by the Academics as a means of performing actions while still refraining from assent.¹³⁵ According to Stoic theory, actions were nothing but assents to a

133 “But no one doubts that we are impelled to learn by the dual weight of authority and reason. Therefore I have resolved not to depart from the authority of Christ in any matter, for I do not find a stronger one. But since I am moved in such a way that I impatiently desire not only to believe what is true but to grasp it through understanding, that which must be followed by the most subtle reasoning, I trust will be found among the Platonists, and that it will not disagree with our scriptures, rites and doctrines” (*Nulli autem dubium est gemino pondere nos impelli ad discendum auctoritatis atque rationis. Mihi ergo certum est nusquam prorsus a Christi auctoritate discedere; non enim reperio ualentiorum. Quod autem subtilissima ratione persequendum est – ita enim iam sum affectus, ut quid sit uerum non credendo solum sed etiam intelligendo apprehendere impatienter desiderem – apud Platonicos me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, reperturum esse confido, C. Acad. 3.43*).

134 The relation between faith and reason in Augustine is complex, and a full treatment would require looking to texts spread across the course of his entire career. For wide-ranging discussions, see Frederick Van Fleteren, “Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973): 33-71; Norman Kretzmann, “Faith Seeks, Understanding Finds: Augustine’s Charter for Christian Philosophy,” in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Flint (Notre Dame 1990): 1-36; John Rist, “Faith and Reason.” At present, I will look to this issue only insofar as it bears on the *overall* structure of the Cassiciacum dialogues and plays a role within the method Augustine articulates in them. While the dialogues make passing reference to faith as an alternative to the way of reason (*C. Acad.* 2.42 and *De ord.* 2.27), I will focus on faith insofar as it is a *part* of philosophical inquiry of the sort Augustine pursues in these works.

135 See the public history’s presentation at *C. Acad.* 2.12.

particular class of 'hormetic' impressions, i.e. impressions of the form, 'it is fitting for me to perform action X now.' By refusing to assent to this type of impression, the Academic would, according to Stoic theory, be left in a state of complete inactivity. The Academics countered this *absurdum* by pointing to the affective aspect of *probabile* impressions within Stoic psychology: impressions such as, "it would be good for me to rescue the infant that just fell into a river," exercise a subjective pull on our faculty of assent. According to the Academics, it is enough for action that one simply give in or follow (*sequi*) this pull, yet in so doing one takes no stand on the truth or falsity of the impression. The Academics called this giving in 'approval' (*approbare*), which they differentiated from assent (*assentire*), and they claimed that it sufficed for performing action without leading one into the error of assent in the absence of cognitive impressions.¹³⁶ This second aspect of Academic *probabilia* is retained in *C. Acad.*'s constructive case, insofar as *C. Acad.* is concerned with a particular kind of action, inquiry after the truth, which may be prematurely stopped by the dual dangers of superstition and despair.¹³⁷

Unlike the Academics, who risked falling into inactivity because of their universal refusal to assent, Augustine clearly does not reject *all* assent: it is a central point of *C. Acad.*'s argument that we constantly use cognitive norms of thought, to which we can assent without any danger of error. Yet, as we have seen, these cognitive impressions were all fairly basic. One might think that Augustine follows the Academics in refusing to assent only to big picture theories, whose

136 For discussion of Stoic/Academic theory generally see Michael Frede, "The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987): 201-222; Richard Bett, "Carneades' *Pithanon*: a Reappraisal of its Role and Status," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1989): 59-94, as well as "Carneades' Distinction Between Assent and Approval," *Monist* 73/1 (1990): 3-20; Tad Brennan, "Reasonable Impressions in Stoicism," *Phronesis* 41/3 (1996): 318-334. For the applications of this material in *C. Acad.*, see Therese Fuhrer, "Der Begriff *veri simile* bei Cicero und Augustin," *Museum Helveticum* 50/2 (1993): 107-125.

137 Cicero reports at *Academica* 2.104ff that *probabilia* were introduced as a means of performing action *and* engaging in argument. Augustine reports that the Academics responded to the charge that their Sage would do nothing (*nihil agere*), always be asleep (*dormire semper*), and desert all his duties (*omnium officium desertor*) [CA2.12]. This account may seem to highlight action more than argument, yet these various terms are generic enough to include both: see *De ord.* 2.7 which identifies 'teaching wisdom' as the greatest duty of the sage.

cognitive status is still uncertain to him. If this were right, then *C. Acad.*'s grand *probabile* conclusion that the Truth can be found with the Platonists and Catholic Christians would be something Augustine 'approves' of but does not 'assent' to. In this case, the Academics' system of *probabilia* and Augustine's conception of faith would differ only in their respective terminology. What's more, Augustine's motivation for adopting this system would (at least in part) be the same as the Academics', viz. to avoid erring through assent to the incognitive. This does not, however, sit well with the text.

Augustine offers a thought experiment.¹³⁸ Two travelers ask for directions: the first 'assents' (without adequate warrant) to one set of directions but quickly reaches his destination; the second 'approves' of a different set of directions and gets thoroughly lost. Augustine concludes that if the first one erred, then both of them did,¹³⁹ and he proceeds to spell out parallel examples of approval and assent in legal settings. Some scholars take this to be *C. Acad.*'s 'definitive refutation of skepticism.'¹⁴⁰ We should, however, note that it comes *after* Augustine's long list of cognitive impressions which demonstrates that cognition is possible. Given that the Academics' argument against assent rested on their prior argument against the possibility of cognition, there is no need for *another* refutation of the Academics' use of *probabilia*. 'Defenders' of this passage have argued that it is this later discussion of *probabilia* rather than the earlier 'epistemological' discussion of cognition that constitutes *C. Acad.*'s 'real refutation.'¹⁴¹ Others

138 This comes within Augustine's *oratio perpetua* at *C. Acad.* 3.34-36.

139 "It easier [to think] that both travelers err, than that that one [who approves but gets lost] does not." (*facilius ambo errant, quam iste non errat.*) *C. Acad.* 3.34.

140 Brian Harding, "Epistemology and Eudaimonism;" John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism;" David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*."

141 Harding, Heil and Mosher defend this line in opposition to what Harding has dubbed the 'received reading.' They find the main thrust of the work to be 'moral' and cite the legal formulations of Augustine's thought experiment as the crux of the whole work's argument. Given the connection of wisdom and happiness in ancient eudaimonism, this opposition of epistemology and morality supposes a false dichotomy, as Sophie Van der Meer, "La sagesse," has helpfully pointed out. What's more, the morality discussed by these scholars has more to do with civic behavior than with happiness/flourishing (*beata vita*) and thus falls far short of articulating the

have seen this later passage as simply an attempt at kicking the skeptics when they're already down.¹⁴² I suggest, once again, that we stop looking at *C. Acad.*'s arguments as nothing more than attempts to refute skepticism, and ask what function this passage serves in Augustine's constructive use of Academic practice.

Augustine uses this thought-experiment to expand the Stoic/Academic definition of error as assent to an incognitive impression. On the basis of this definition, the first traveler (who assented and arrived at his destination) errs, while the second (who approved and got lost) does not. This absurd consequence allows Augustine to argue that the Stoic/Academic definition is too narrow, insofar as it omits instances in which one fails to follow a true impression.¹⁴³ Given this expanded definition of error, both travelers err. This rather bleak outcome advances Augustine's constructive project, insofar as it allows him to introduce considerations beyond the avoidance of error (in its new expanded sense), at least when matters of action are concerned. In the case of the two travelers, the relevant consideration is whether or not one arrives at his destination: the first traveler commits an epistemic error, yet arrives at his destination; the second avoids this epistemic error but commits what we might call a 'practical error' in getting thoroughly lost. It is, of course, best to avoid both sorts of error, but in situations when this is impossible, Augustine argues that an individual is in some sense justified in committing an epistemic error (which the Stoics and Academics avoid at all costs), when by doing so he may escape a practical error.¹⁴⁴

ultimate goal of Augustine's philosophical undertaking. See also Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism*, 81, for the claim that the *apraxia* argument is 'political' rather than 'philosophical.'

142 Christopher Kirwan, "Against the Skeptics."

143 "For I think that not only he who follows a false path errs, but also he who fails to follow a true path" (*Non enim solum puto eum errare, qui falsam uiam sequitur, sed etiam eum, qui ueram non sequitur, C. Acad.* 3.34). 'Following' is another term for approval. This choice of terms helps bring out the practical nature of the current argument.

144 In the courtroom examples which follow, the practical error to be avoided is 'sinning' (*peccare*). Proponents of the 'ethical' reading of *C. Acad.* have, in my view, been taken in by the thick rhetoric of the passage and as a result, seen the ethical implications of *C. Acad.* in too narrow (i.e. modern) terms of correct action, rather than the more robust (i.e. ancient) conception of happiness/human flourishing.

Within *C. Acad.*, the further consideration relevant to action is whether or not one eventually attains wisdom. The person who reaches this goal escapes error by all definitions, and Augustine concludes that one is justified in erring (through assenting to the incognitive), when this may lead one out of error altogether.

With this, Augustine shows that the Academics' strategy of limiting themselves to approval is insufficient for avoiding error: one must approve of the *right* impressions, i.e. those which will advance some practical end. Given this outcome, Augustine sets aside the Academic injunction to approve rather than assent, and he focuses instead on these practical considerations. Within his constructive account, he advocates only one basic epistemic act: assent. Yet it is vital to this method that the student not lose track of his justification for his assents. For a cognitive impressions, such as those arrived at through self-reflection, one may assent on the basis of its cognitive status, and count this impressions known.¹⁴⁵ When one assents to an incognitive impression, he commits an epistemic error, which the Stoics and Academics urged us to avoid at all costs, yet according to Augustine, he is justified in doing so.¹⁴⁶

145 The Stoics distinguished between individual cognitive impressions and knowledge, which is a holistic state composed of several cognitive impressions: see Cicero, *Academica* 1.41-2. Augustine rejects this distinction in *Sol.*: "Reason: Therefore, if you have any learning about these things, you do not hesitate to call it 'knowledge'? Augustine: I wouldn't hesitate, if the Stoics would allow it, for they attribute knowledge to no one but the Sage. However I don't deny that I grasp those things, and the Stoics grant this even to the state of folly; but I'm not afraid of these Stoics in the slightest. Without getting into such distinctions [*prorsus*] I hold the things you asked about by means of knowledge. Go ahead, then, so that I can see what point you're getting at in asking these things" (*R. Ergo istarum rerum disciplinam, si qua tibi est, non dubitas uocare scientiam? A. Non, si Stoici sinant, qui scientiam tribuunt nulli, nisi sapienti. Perceptionem sane istorum me habere non nego, quam etiam stultitiae concedunt: sed nec istos quidquam pertimesco. Prorsus haec quae interrogasti scientia teneo: perge modo; uideam quorsum ista quaeris, Sol.* 1.9). I take this to be a point about terminology, viz. Augustine is saying that he is not going to reserve '*scientia*' to refer only to a holistic state, but will use it to refer to any instance of cognition. Regardless of his use of technical language, Augustine retains the substantive distinction between a fool (*stultus*) who grasps various things and a sage (*sapiens*) who grasps wisdom. By conflating these two substantive categories, various scholars infer that *C. Acad.*'s list of cognitive impressions is meant to show that wisdom is possible, *insofar as these cognitive impressions constitute wisdom*. Such a conflation seems to underlie the 'ethical readings' of Harding *et al.*, as well as the estimation of John O'Meara, *Against the academics*, that *C. Acad.*'s argumentation is confused, hence the need for the Incarnate Christ to show us the Truth.

146 While it is somewhat later, we find the same argument laid out more clearly at *De util. cred.* 25.

This is faith, viz. assenting to an incognitive impression for some practical end. This particular brand of 'error' ends up being central to the Platonist method that Augustine sets out.¹⁴⁷ Through a process of self-reflective discovery, the student comes to see certain Platonist positions as *probabile*. This process produces some evidence for the truth of such accounts, but evidence which by no means demonstrates their certain truth. The student is nevertheless called to assent to them as though they were true, and thus to enter into a state of faith as an intermediary step in the pursuit of wisdom.

It has become generally recognized that Descartes relies on Augustine for his response to skepticism.¹⁴⁸ The present discussion shows an important respect in which their two projects *diverge*. Both begin by setting a certainty requirement as a means of clearing the slate, which they then start filling in again with certainties arrived at through self-reflection. Yet these initial moves are situated within two quite different projects. Descartes explicitly cuts himself off from the school philosophies presented by his particular historical circumstances, seeking an intellectual vacuum in which to construct a demonstrative science upon the basis of self-evident first principles. When Augustine moves from skeptical doubt to self-reflective certainty, it is as a means of *choosing* between the competing authorities which are available to him within his own particular time and place, and he proceeds to advocate assenting to authoritative doctrines whose truth is still uncertain. From a Cartesian perspective, Augustine retreats to dogmatism before coming close to the finish line. Yet Descartes himself runs into serious problems when he attempts to move from self-evident foundations through demonstrative deductions to substantive

147 Augustine's discussion of the two travelers is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, and while he is quick to point out that the act of faith he advocates amounts to error by Stoic / Academic definitions, it is unclear whether or not he himself shares in this evaluation.

148 See Gareth Matthews, *Thought's Ego*; Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge, 1998).

conclusions about the world.¹⁴⁹ From an Augustinian perspective, Descartes extends a methodology beyond its breaking point and introduces faith under the guise of science.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

Several centuries separate Augustine and the last of the Academic skeptics. Allegiance to this group, or even its ideas, was not a live option in 386 in the same way that allegiance to Manicheism or Platonism was. It is thus an open question *why* Augustine chose to engage the skeptical Academy at such length in this first work of his new career.¹⁵¹ The common assumption, that in the late fourth-century a powerful, threatening skeptic lurked around every corner, in all likelihood rests on modern readers taking Augustine's rhetoric too seriously. Academic skepticism was, however, the position advanced in the works of Cicero, “father of Latin philosophy” and Augustine's main philosophical source. It strikes me as more plausible that Augustine's need to confront skepticism, if he in fact felt such a need, stems from this fact. But rather than argue that Cicero was wrong and championed positions that were simply false, Augustine brings Cicero into his own camp and integrates Cicero's Academic skeptical practices into a crypto-Platonist project of teaching through impasse. Through this creative reading of his predecessor's works, Augustine makes Cicero his model not just for philosophy but for Platonist philosophy. Having orchestrated such a scenario, Augustine may proceed to engage Cicero's skepticism in the way Cicero 'intended:' to refute it in ways that lead to Platonism.

The four main practices of Academic skepticism provide both the subject matter for *C.*

149 For a review of the 'Cartesian Circle,' see Lex Newman, “Descartes' Epistemology,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/>.

150 Pascal perhaps offers a closer modern parallel to Augustine's broad strategy: given widespread uncertainty when it comes to matters of wisdom and God, it is rational for us, *ceteris paribus*, to make wagers, and take ideas on faith when doing so may eventually lead us out of uncertainty.

151 Topping agrees that Augustine ultimately did not take skepticism to be so grave a threat, but treated it as something “in the air,” for which he cites *Ep.* 1.2 as evidence. Ryan Topping, “The Perils of Skepticism.”

Acad.'s first-order debates and raw material for the methodology that Augustine uses to move beyond skepticism. Zeno's certainty requirement is used by Augustine to cut away all empirically-obtained perceptions. This serves to focus our attention on those certainties which we in some sense already carry with us, even though we may not acknowledge them until we turn to reflect on our own rational activities.¹⁵² These certainties undermine the Academic's arguments against the possibility of cognition, and this, in turn, undermines the Academics' practice of universally withholding assent. This much justifies assent to these self-reflective certainties. But Augustine is interested in more than such meager discoveries as "Zeno's definition is true or false" and "something seems white to me." He therefore expands the Stoic/Academic definition of error as assent to the incognitive, and he argues that one also errs when he *fails* to assent to a true impression. Given the intractability of error, Augustine concludes that one is justified in erring through assent to an incognitive impression, when doing so may eventually lead him out of error.

In arguing against the possibility of cognition, the historical Academics often invoked the fact that an individual's own physical or intellectual condition affects how he perceives the world.¹⁵³ Augustine puts this same observation to constructive use, as he amasses self-reflective discoveries, which are cognitive by the Academics' own standards, in a concerted effort to change his student's constitution and thus *improve* how he perceives the world. The big point of *C. Acad.* is to show how this is done. Through the work's competing histories of the Academy, Augustine articulates a method of un-learning and self-discovery, by which a teacher rewrites the store of impressions his student has assented to. Augustine shows this method in action through

152 See Therese Fuhrer, "Skeptizismus und Subjektivität," for the '*Verinnerlichung*' accomplished through Augustine's encounter with skepticism.

153 See, for instance, Cicero's *Academica* 2.18-22 & 2.46-52.

the dialogue's debates and reflections on them. *C. Acad.* serves a propaedeutic function as it shows Augustine's students being prepared for Platonist modes of thought.

While one may expect such an undertaking in the first of a projected series of works, we should not be too hasty in declaring this work *merely* propaedeutic or propaedeutic *in ways that Augustine's subsequent works are not*. We find the same basic method deployed in the remaining two Cassiciacum works, the five dialogues that follow them and even *Conf.* In chapter 5, I will argue that for Augustine all philosophy is, in a sense, propaedeutic. The Cassiciacum works and *C. Acad.* in particular spell out what this sense is. In this, they provide a vital key to understanding the kind of philosophy that Augustine pursues in his broader *oeuvre*.

CHAPTER 3

De beata uita

De beata v. presents a three-day feast in honor of Augustine's birthday. Happiness is the topic of discussion and characters express a wide array of positions, most of them obviously true. This lack of controversy seems to reduce the whole to mere table talk, to pleasant banter in which characters express views already held by all. If we are to take *De beata v.* to be a serious philosophical dialogue, one in which actual philosophical work is accomplished, we must uncover the dialectical texture underlying all this agreement. Only then can we determine what the point of the undertaking might be and evaluate how successful the effort has been.

The task of finding a single project running through *De beata v.* is further complicated, insofar as the various truths presented in the work seem to fall into two categories, philosophical and theological, while it is far from obvious how the two classes are related. Of all the Cassiciacum works, *De beata v.* is the most explicitly concerned with matters of Christian dogma, culminating in an extended discussion of the Holy Trinity's role in human happiness. Augustine's mother, Monica, is given pride of place a kind of Christian oracle, who expounds great truths despite her lack of education.¹⁵⁴ While a focus on Monica and the work's theological material may tell us various things, the basic project of *De beata v.* is not one of them. At best, such approaches can tell us what Augustine, the author, might have thought about various issues, but they cannot tell us why he did so, or why we should find such positions appealing.¹⁵⁵ The

¹⁵⁴ For an extended discussion, see Catherine Conybeare, *Irrational Augustine*.

¹⁵⁵ Scholars interested in the development of Augustine's understanding of the Holy Trinity take this work as a first watermark. See Jacques Verhees, "Augustins Trinitätsverständnis in den Schriften aus Cassiciacum," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975): 45-75; Lewis Ayres, "'Giving Wings to Nicaea': Reconceiving Augustine's Earliest Trinitarian Theology," *Augustinian Studies* 38/1 (2007): 21-40.

work's debates, meanwhile, reproduce the major moves of Hellenistic moral thought, and characters conspicuously engage in the Stoics' syllogistic approach to argument.¹⁵⁶ This neat setup gives the impression of philosophy in the Euclidean mode, as proofs are derived from self-evident principles. Yet these debates fail to arrive at any substantive conclusion. And if we step back and look for the structure of the whole work, we find that *De beata v.* begins by setting merely necessary conditions for happiness, but ends as Augustine declares that a correct relation to the Christian Trinity is both necessary *and* sufficient for human *vita beata*. This tacit slide from merely necessary to necessary and sufficient conditions threatens *De beata v.*'s overall argument at the most basic level.

Scholars have avoided this issue by simply not looking for a single argument stretching across *De beata v.* as a whole. Augustine's Trinitarian speculations come in a passage of *oratio perpetua* which follows the work's debate, and scholars have, with amazing regularity, treated either one part or the other. What's more, the presence of Stoic material in the work's debate strengthens an apparent contrast between the work's 'philosophical' and 'theological / dogmatic' halves.¹⁵⁷ Yet the work clearly brings philosophy and theology into some relation. I propose to take the work's apparent incoherence not as a problem to be avoided but a challenge to find a

156 For discussion, see Sabine Harwardt, "Die Glücksfrage der Stoa in Augustins *De Beata Vita*: Übernahme und Anwendung stoischer Argumentationsmuster," in *Zur Rezeption der hellenistischen Philosophie in der Spätantike*, ed. T. Fuhrer & M. Ehler (Stuttgart, 1999): 153-171; James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge, 1992): 55-61.

157 Sabine Harwardt focuses on the work's debates but ignores the end of the work entirely. James Wetzel presents a helpful analysis of the debate's 'Stoic tactics' but treats the closing discussion of the Trinity as something of a footnote. F. Asiedu, "The Wise Man and the Limits of Virtue in *De Beata Vita*: Stoic Self-Sufficiency or Augustinian Irony?" *Augustiniana* 49 (1999): 215-234, attempts to defend the role of the Trinity in *De beata v.* against Wetzel's reading, but in the process misconstrues *De beata v.*'s debate. Jacques Verhees and Lewis Ayres, by contrast, ignore the work's debates entirely, looking exclusively to the Trinitarian material of the *oratio perpetua*. Michael Foley, "Cicero and Augustine," likewise jumps to the end for the 'terra firma' of divine revelation. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Augustin et la fin de la culture*, 308-315, refuses to acknowledge even the presence of a concluding *oratio perpetua* in *De beata v.* On his reading of the Cassiciacum works, closing *orationes* provide Augustine a venue for offering his own positive contribution to the problem under discussion, while the works' initial debates serve as dialectical exercises of some sort. Marrou apparently finds no positive contribution anywhere in *De beata v.*, and declares the whole of it captious and full of dialectical jousting.

model that may accommodate all of the text.

In what follows, I will argue that *De beata v.* follows the 'Platonist' method set out in *C. Acad.*, as a first-order debate gives way to second-order reflection on that act of debate, while debate and reflection together provide a jumping off point for the work's final *probabile* conclusion. The fruit of these various moves is a set of first- and second-order *explananda* which are responded to by Augustine's closing *probabile* account of the Trinity and its role in human moral psychology. The certain truth of this conclusion is nowhere demonstrated in *De beata v.* In this, we do not find a demonstrative argument that didn't go quite right; *De beata v.*'s ultimate end, rather, is to bring about a change in how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world. As with *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.* pursues a propaedeutic end, as it prepares individuals for the intellectualist modes of thought which Augustine endorses in these works.

Christian inspiration and Hellenistic epistemology

Debate begins as Augustine asks his interlocutors whether they want to be happy. They respond with one voice that they do, although Monica is quick to add that this is not enough, and that to be happy, one must want good things and not bad things.¹⁵⁸ Augustine, as author, thus sets out the two necessary conditions for happiness as presented in Cicero's *Hortensius*, while Augustine, the character, is quick to point out that his mother, without any philosophical training, has taken the very citadel (*arx*) of philosophy. Various scholars have seen Monica acting as some kind of Christian oracle, who can channel deep philosophical truths through inspiration alone.¹⁵⁹

158 *Atque ego rursus exordiens: Beatos esse nos uolumus, inquam? Vix hoc effuderam, occurrerunt una uoce consentientes. – Videturne uobis, inquam, beatus esse, qui quod uult non habet? – Negauerunt. – Quid? omnis qui quod uult habet, beatus est? – Tum mater: Si bona, inquit, uelit et habeat, beatus est, si autem mala uelit, quamuis habeat, miser est (De beata v. 10).*

159 See Joanne McWilliam, "Cassiciacum autobiography," Jean Doignon, "'Vie heureuse' et perfection: Variantes philosophiques dans l'unisson d'Augustin et de Monique à la fin de *De Beata Vita*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 41 (1995): 309-314; Larissa Seelbach, "'Wie sollte ich selbst da nicht mit Freuden Dein Schüler werden wollen?' – Augustin über Monnicas Weg zu Gott," *Augustiniana* 55 (2005): 297-319; Catherine

Augustine himself describes his mother in such terms,¹⁶⁰ yet we must note from the outset that her first and most important pronouncement is not some *magnum mysterium*; rather, it is a truism which would be readily accepted by any rational human being on a moment's thought.¹⁶¹ The Thomistic distinction between natural and supernatural sources of first principles is not at play here.¹⁶² The present task is, rather, to find an account of human psychology that may explain how Monica is capable of being inspired in such a way. In Hellenistic terms, *De beata v.* begins by invoking two common concepts, that is to say impressions which are shared by all rational human beings and make rational thought possible. One of these is put forth by Monica in her oracular mode. But contrary to scholarly trends, we should not assume that Hellenistic epistemology and Christian inspiration must be mutually exclusive categories. In the end, Augustine's account of the Trinity will find a place for both kinds of *explananda*, as it offers at once a Christian explanation of our access to the common concepts, and a naturalistic account of Monica's divine inspiration.¹⁶³

Conybeare, *Irrational Augustine*.

160 Upon reciting Cicero's words from the Hortensius, "Monica so cried out in response to these words, that we completely forgot her sex and believed that some great man was sitting with us; I, however, understood, as much as I was able, from what and how great a font these things flowed" (*In quibus uerbis illa sic exclamabat, ut obliti penitus sexus eius, magnum aliquem uirum considerare nobiscum crederemus me interim, quantum poteram, intelligente, ex quo illa, et quam diuino fonte manarent, De beata v. 10*).

161 Or at least that is how it is presented. There is a substantive question as to whether the good things in question are good by some objective standard or good for the individual who wants them. The latter seems a less controversial condition for happiness, although it leaves open the question of wanting bad things. Debaters address this worry with their discussion of Sergius Orata (*De beata v. 26-28*). In the end, they claim that those who want bad things are miserable whether or not they get them.

162 Such categories go hand in hand with Euclidean or Aristotelian demonstrative sciences. See Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity," for an attempt to read Augustine's early thought in such a light.

163 In *C. Acad.*, Augustine drew attention to the Academics' use of the common concepts in rational inquiry. This allowed him both to undermine the skeptical thesis that cognition is impossible and to secure a jumping off point for his final *probabile* account, which posits some kind of human access to an intelligible world. *De beata v.* continues this project, as its debates provide a wider array of common concepts, and Augustine's closing account provides a fuller picture of human psychology and its connection to the intelligible world.

First- and second-order *vera*

The work proceeds as debaters attempt to identify what one must do to meet these two conditions for happiness, viz. having what one wants and having good things. They entertain three main suggestions, viz. having secure things, having wisdom, and having God. The exact relationship between these suggestions is somewhat murky. No single suggestion is ever rejected as false, although each progressive step seems to offer a more basic explanation than the last. If this stretch of text strikes us as somewhat stilted, it is because debaters are still working through the common concepts, and this part of the debate moves forward as debaters attempt to piece together a coherent account out of ideas already agreed to by everyone involved.

However these debates may strike us, we should note that Augustine's companions find them riveting. Debaters are dismayed when an argument challenges some belief they already held,¹⁶⁴ and they react with exuberance each time a puzzle is resolved by invoking some view they all already believed.¹⁶⁵ At first blush, it may seem that Augustine, as author, is merely

164 At *De beata* v. 15 Licentius contradicts himself in attempting to escape Augustine's anti-skeptical argument: ““Well then,” Licentius said laughing irritably, “the person who does not have what he wants is happy.” But when I ordered that this be written, he shouted out, “I didn't say that.” Likewise, when I nodded that it should be written, he said “I did say it”” (*Prorsus beatus est, inquit, qui quod uult non habet, quasi stomachanter arridens. Quod cum iuberem ut scriberetur: Non dixi, inquit exclamans. Quod item cum annuerem scribi: Dixi, inquit*). When Augustine uses Adeodatus' account of the person who has God to spin out a puzzle at *De beata* v. 19, Monica is “dumbstruck for a while” (*diu stupida*).

165 When Augustine presents an anti-skeptical argument as the first day's dessert, “At this, they all cried out at once, snatching the whole 'dish.' But Licentius more attentively and more cautiously feared giving his assent, and said, “I snatched up this dessert with you, since indeed I cried out being moved by this conclusion” (*Hic repente illi quasi totum rapientes exclamauerunt. Sed Licentius attentius et cautius aduertens timuit assensionem, atque subiecit: Rapui quidem uobiscum, si quidem exclamaui illa conclusione commotus, De beata* v. 14). At *De beata* v. 27 Monica explains that Sergius Orata was miserable because he lacked wisdom, and “All cried out in wonder then, and I myself was more than a little joyful and delighted because it was by her that this most powerful thing, which I had intended to bring forth at the end as a great thing from the books of the philosophers, had been spoken; I therefore said, “Do you see that many and varied doctrines are one thing, a soul most intent on God is another? For where do these things at which we wonder proceed from if not from there? At this Licentius, delighted, cried out saying, “Certainly nothing more true, nothing more divine could be said!”” (*Vbi cum omnes mirando exclamassent me ipso etiam non mediocriter alacri atque laeto, quod ab ea potissimum dictum esset, quod pro magno de philosophorum libris atque ultimum proferre paraveram: Videtisne, inquam, aliud esse multas variasque doctrinas, aliud animum attentissimum in Deum? Nam unde ista quae miramur, nisi inde procedunt? Hic Licentius laetus exclamans: Prorsus, inquit, nihil verius, nihil divinius dici potuit*). When Augustine reveals his account of the Trinity at the very end, Monica responds by blurting out a line of Ambrose

attempting to make palatable an otherwise dull line of argument, adding narrative details which help keep the reader's attention but do not substantively alter that line of argument itself. When we look more closely, however, we find that debaters' affective experiences of debate direct the course of *De beata v.*'s debate itself, and do so at a fundamental level. In the end, these experiences help debaters realize their own desire for truth as a basic motivating force in their lives. This self-reflective discovery will provide a second-order *explanandum*, which will, in turn, be addressed by Augustine's concluding account which credits the Holy Spirit as responsible for the *admonitio* which leads all human beings to the Truth (i.e. Christ).¹⁶⁶

Within the debate itself, the pull of this desire for truth is enough to influence debaters, even before they have articulated the fact that they feel such a desire. This is clearest in their discussion of Sergius Orata.¹⁶⁷ In the course of investigating the first requirement for happiness, viz. having what one wants, Augustine asks whether every unhappy person (*miser*) lacks (*eget*) something. He invokes the famously wealthy Orata as a thought experiment, stipulating that the man had every desire satisfied, not by reining in his desires by the application of wisdom, but through simple good fortune.¹⁶⁸ Licentius suggests that Orata was unhappy insofar as he feared losing his possessions. Augustine points out that it is lack, not fear, that is under question, and Monica again steals the day by claiming that the fact that Orata feared losing the goods of fortune shows that he lacked wisdom (*eget sapientia*). The assembled company are again delighted by this response. We should note, however, that this solution would not be readily accepted by absolutely anyone on a moment's thought: Orata himself would hardly admit to

“*foue precantes, Trinitas*” (*De beata v.* 35), and the whole company is left “rejoicing and praising God” (*gaudentibus et laudantibus Deum*, *De beata v.* 36). See also *De beata v.* 10 cited above.

166 *De beata v.* 34-35.

167 *De beata v.* 26-28.

168 See Jean Doignon, “Développements stoïcisants d’Augustin autour de l’“exemplum” cicéronien d’Orata,” *Signum Pietatis* 60 (1989): 53-61.

being miserable, were it pointed out that he lacked wisdom which he never wanted in the first place. What Augustine's companions have seen, and Orata has missed, is their own desire for the truth,¹⁶⁹ a desire which has been stirred up through rational inquiry.¹⁷⁰ While Augustine's companions have not yet articulated this desire, they have felt its pull during the course of their debate, and as a result they do not even entertain the 'ignorance is bliss' response.

At this point, we have seen two fundamentally different ways in which *De beata v.*'s debaters have established truths. First of all, they use their direct access to common concepts, such as the initial requirements for happiness, viz. having what one wants and wanting good things. Such ideas would be readily agreed to by any rational adult on a moment's thought (even if that thought is sometimes occasioned by a divinely inspired utterance). Yet this debate has also established, or at least begun to establish, another type of second-order truth about human psychology, a type of truth discovered through reflection on the act of inquiry itself: in this case, the fact that these debaters desire the truth. The relation between these two types of truths becomes interesting at the point when the work's debate begins breaking down.

A puzzle about seeking God

The debate's main line of inquiry stemmed from an attempt to show what scenario would satisfy the initial two requirements for happiness. The discussion moved in short order from having secure things, to having wisdom, to having God. This leads naturally to the question of

169 Augustine eventually uses scripture to justify this slide from Orata's not wanting *wisdom* to Orata's not realizing his own desire for the *truth*: both are ultimately a desire for the Son. See below.

170 The desire for truth is presumably not created by means of inquiry. Debaters' immediate response to Augustine's opening question, "do you all want to be happy," for instance, shows that a desire was already present. It is rather that the process of inquiry makes the desire more salient, more acute. This is what I mean by 'stirred up.' The amount of crying this entails within the dialogue may strike modern readers as somewhat contrived, but I take such displays of emotion to function merely as a means of showing the inner emotional states of Augustine's companions. For a different discussion of crying in these works, see Catherine Conybeare, *Irrational Augustine*, ch. 3 and Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism*.

what it means 'to have God.' It is at this point that problems arise. Various accounts are suggested,¹⁷¹ although Adeodatus eventually wins out with 'the person who attends to God and holds himself to Him alone' (*qui Deum attendit et ad ipsum solum se tenet*).¹⁷² But this raises a puzzle, since the person who seeks for God (*quaerit Deum*) fulfills the description of someone who attends to God (*attendit Deum*) in all relevant respects; yet insofar as this person seeks God, he clearly does not yet have God (*habet Deum*).¹⁷³ Such a person thus does and does not have God. The problem is made even more acute, insofar as all involved had already rejoiced at an analogous *reductio* of the Academics' skeptical wisdom, which Augustine served up as the first day's 'dessert.'¹⁷⁴

Debaters attempt to resolve this puzzle by drawing more and more distinctions, yet in the end they fail to articulate any satisfying resolution. It is this stretch of text in which *De beata* v.'s use of Stoic syllogistic is the clearest.¹⁷⁵ Here, as in the rest of the work, syllogistic logic is used to articulate and elaborate puzzles, yet in so doing, debaters never actually solve anything. At best their syllogisms move the problem back a step. This process eventually comes to an end, as debate collapses into *aporia*, and Augustine is left to proceed through *oratio perpetua*.

It was the process of working through first-order *vera* that led Augustine's companions into this *aporia*; it is the second-order reflection on such rational activity that Augustine will use

171 "The person who lives well; the person who does what God wants; the person who does not have an impure spirit" (*Qui bene uitit... qui facit quae Deus uult... qui spiritum immundum non habet*, *De beata* v. 12).

172 This is offered as an elaboration of what it means "not to have an impure spirit" (*De beata* v. 18). For the discussion leading to this final formulation see *De beata* v. 12, 17-18.

173 *De beata* v. 19.

174 *De beata* v. 13-16. The analogy between cases is made explicit at *De beata* v. 20: "“I would like to agree,” Navigius said, “but I fear that you will conclude that the Academic, who still seeks, will be especially happy, the Academic who in terribly vulgar, yet still quite fitting Latin, as it seems to me, was dubbed ‘an epileptic’” (*Vellem, inquit Nauigius, consentire, sed illum uereor qui adhuc quaerit, praesertim ne concludas beatum esse Academicum, qui hesterno sermone, uulgari quidem et male Latino, sed aptissimo sane, ut mihi uidetur, uerbo caducarius nominatus est*).

175 For analysis, see Sabine Harwardt, "Argumentationsmuster."

to get them out again. The Orata episode suggests two different relations to truth, which Augustine uses to solve the puzzle of having God. On the one hand, those of us who are not wise still grasp some truths, viz. the common concepts; yet it does not follow from this that we grasp the whole of truth, which would constitute wisdom. Augustine suggests that it is our cognition of part of truth that gives rise to our desire for the whole of truth. By applying various bits of scripture, Augustine identifies both wisdom and truth with the Son of God,¹⁷⁶ and he suggests that the happy person 'has God' insofar as he grasps the whole of truth. Yet there is another way in which an individual may have God, i.e. by grasping part of truth, by which he is 'moved' to grasp the whole of truth. Augustine identifies this affective *admonitio* as the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁷ A single person may thus simultaneously have and not have God, albeit in these two different senses.¹⁷⁸ But even if we grant that Augustine's account of Christ as wisdom and the Holy Spirit as *admonitio* resolves *De beata v.*'s puzzle about having God, this alone hardly *proves* that his account is true. To see what kind of justification, if any, Augustine gives for this account, we must step back and look at the progression of *De beata v.* as a whole.

Happiness and the Trinity

Augustine's final account of the Trinity's role in human happiness turns on ideas of measure (*modus*).¹⁷⁹ According to this account, God the Son, who is Wisdom, acts as the *modus*

176 "But what should we say wisdom is except the 'wisdom of God'? But we accept on the authority of divine scripture that the Son of God is none other than the Wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:24) and is himself very God... But what do you think wisdom is but truth? For this has also been said, "I am the Truth" (John 16:6)" (*Quae est autem dicenda sapientia nisi quae Dei sapientia est? Accepimus autem etiam auctoritate diuina Dei filium nihil esse aliud quam Dei sapientiam, et est Dei filius profecto Deus... Sed quid putatis esse sapientiam, nisi ueritatem? Etiam hoc enim dictum est: Ego sum ueritas, De beata v. 34*).

177 Doignon traces the development of the *admonitio* as a certain kind of rhetorical device as a means of situating *De beata v.* against a backdrop of rhetorical tradition. Jean Doignon, "La *praxis* de l'*admonitio* dans les Dialogues de Cassiciacum de saint Augustin," *Vetera Christianorum* 23 (1986): 21-37.

178 Augustine's claim is not that cognition of part of truth is accomplished through the Holy Spirit. On *De beata v.*'s closing account, any and all truth is from the Son; it is rather the affective *admonitio* that results from this partial cognition that Augustine associates with the Holy Spirit. See below.

179 See Augustine's *oratio perpetua* generally (*De beata v.* 30-35), which anchors this notion of measure in Latin

animi; 'having wisdom' and 'having God' thus come out as the same, since the human mind which conforms fully to this intelligible paradigm is perfectly structured by it and in this perfection finds happiness. Those minds which conform less than perfectly are nevertheless still subject to wisdom's structuring power, which is made manifest in the use of the common concepts and in the Holy Spirit's *admonitio ad ueritatem*. The *modus animi* itself, finally, is grounded in the *summus modus*, the measure without measure, God the Father, to which the Son Himself conforms perfectly. As Augustine puts it:

This full satiety of souls, i.e. human happiness, is thus piously and perfectly to grasp [i] by what you are led into Truth, [ii] what Truth you enjoy and [iii] through what you are connected to the highest measure. And these three reveal one God and one substance to intellectual people when the shadows of multiform superstition have been pushed away.

Illa est igitur plena satietas animorum, hoc est beata uita, pie perfecteque cognoscere [i] a quo inducaris in ueritatem, [ii] qua ueritate perfruaris, [iii] per quid conectaris summo modo. Quae tria unum Deum intellegentibus unamque substantiam exclusis uanitatibus uariae superstitionis ostendunt (De beata v. 36).

While this is perhaps somewhat obscure, the point here is to see that the mind's relation to each person of the Trinity is bound up in its relation to Truth, i.e. the Son. Thus, [i] we are led to the Son by the Holy Spirit's *admonitio*, [ii] the Son himself, as Wisdom / Truth, acts as *modus animi* to which the mind conforms, while [iii] the Son acts as our connection to the Father.¹⁸⁰

vocabulary of fullness (*plenitudo*, *frugalitas*) and deficiency (*nequitia*, *egestas*, *De beata* v. 30-33). Particular attention is paid to Cicero and Terence at *De beata* v. 31-32. These notions are used to work out Augustine's account of the Trinity at *De beata* v. 34-35. Such terms are, however, first introduced in the work's opening banter about Trygetius' weight (*De beata* v. 7-9). See discussion below.

180 This solves an interpretive dilemma set out by Jacques Verhees, in "Augustins Trinitätsverständnis:" either the Persons of the Trinity are meant to answer each of these indirect questions, in which case, we find [i] the Father by whom one is called into the truth, [ii] the Son who is the truth one enjoys and [iii] the Holy Spirit through whom one is bound to the highest measure; or, alternatively, the *formulas* within these questions refer to the divine Persons, in which case, [i] the Holy Spirit/*admonitio* is this 'leading' into Truth, [ii] the Son is (again) the Truth which one enjoys, while [iii] the Father is the highest measure to which one is bound. Verhees does not prefer one alternative over the other. My reading splits the difference, finding the Holy Spirit and Son in the answer to the first two questions and the Father in the formula of the last. Lewis Ayres, "Giving Wings to Nicaea," argues that the Trinitarianism expressed here and in the other Cassiciacum works is not economic, i.e. Augustine is not concerned with the Trinity only insofar as it relates to human beings to bring about their salvation. I am only interested in sorting out Augustine's Trinitarian speculations insofar as doing so allows us to see how they function within this text. With that said, the project Augustine undertakes in *De beata* v. and the

The debate in *De beata v.* produces a series of *explananda*, to which Augustine's concluding account of the Trinity responds. At the start of the debate, it was decided that the two necessary conditions for happiness (having what one wants and wanting good things) would be fulfilled by one who has secure things, wisdom and/or God. In Augustine's closing account, the Father's status as *modus sine modo* grounds the eternal security of the Son as humanity's highest good. By identifying the Son with Wisdom and both of these with the *modus animi*, Augustine spells out 'having wisdom' in terms of structuring one's mind according to a rational paradigm or measure. And by distinguishing between cognition of part of Wisdom=Truth=Christ, by which the mind is moved to seek cognition of the whole of Truth, and full cognition, which suffices for happiness, Augustine resolves the puzzle of how the person who seeks God both has God (i.e. the Holy Spirit) and does not have God (i.e. the Son).¹⁸¹

This account also responds to the debate's second-order *explananda*. Augustine describes the Holy Spirit as an *admonitio* flowing from the very font of truth, and this truth as a ray (*iubar*) flowing from the secret sun, to which belongs (*huius*) every truth we speak.¹⁸² While Augustine

methodology he uses to pursue it strike me as *necessitating* an economic treatment of the Trinity. Augustine approaches the Trinity through reflection on the suppositions of his own rational activities, and this allows him to put forth as *probabile* an account of the Trinity *insofar as it relates to human moral psychology*.

181 We must note that "have" in this context is a success term: it is not that a human being enters into a relation with the Son only after attaining complete wisdom and happiness; in both seeking and grasping wisdom and happiness, it is the Son to which the human mind conforms, whether this relation be imperfect, and thus experienced as the Holy Spirit's *admonitio*, or perfect, which is experienced as the enjoyment of Truth, i.e. happiness.

182 "Yet a certain admonition, which endeavors to persuade us to recall God, to seek him, to thirst for him with aversion driven away; this admonition flows to us from the very font of Truth. That secret sun pours this ray into our inner eyes. To this [sun] belongs every truth we speak, and even with eyes that are still less healthy or even those suddenly opened, we with trepidation dare to be boldly turned to him, and to look upon the whole, and this appears to be nothing else than God, perfect with no loss standing in the way. For there all is whole and perfect and at the same time the most powerful God" (*Admonitio autem quaedam, quae nobiscum agit ut Deum recordemur, ut eum quaeramus, ut eum pulso omni fastidio sitiamus, de ipso ad nos fonte ueritatis emanat. Hoc interioribus luminibus nostris iubar sol ille secretus infundit. Huius est verum omne quod loquimur, etiam quando adhuc uel minus sanis uel repente apertis oculis audacter converti et totum intueri trepidamus, nihilque aliud etiam hoc apparet esse quam Deum nulla degeneratione impediante perfectum. Nam ibi totum atque omne perfectum est simulque est omnipotentissimus Deus, De beata v. 35*).

joined ranks with the Stoics in accepting the existence of the common concepts, he parts ways with them, as he offers a non-empiricist account of how human beings have access to these foundations of rationality. It is not through sense perception, but by the Truth shining in our inner eyes (*interioribus luminibus*) that *any* human being comes to know truths such as 'we all want to be happy.' With this, everyday human psychology and Monica's moments of divine inspiration are brought under a single account. Many of the details are lacking, e.g. what conditions must be met to bring about such 'illumination' within an individual's mind, and how normal illumination differs from its inspired counterpart, if at all. Whether Augustine, the historical figure, had thoughts on such details in 386 or not, they do not find their way into this text. The project advanced in *De beata v.* is to draw connections not divisions, as it gives an account of human moral psychology at its most fundamental level. In describing the basic setup of the human mind, any human mind, Augustine credits its relation to the Son as that which makes human beings capable of acquiring any truth, and it is the same presence of the divine in everyday human moral psychology which explains why anyone is ever moved to seek this truth.

These are big claims. The argument of *De beata v.*, taken as a whole, is hardly going to win any converts to Nicene Christianity, and non-Christian philosophers of many different allegiances would find aspects of Augustine's account both absurd and unsupported. While Augustine seems content with how his account meets the challenges he set for it,¹⁸³ he at no point attempts to show that it is the *only* way one may resolve *De beata v.*'s puzzles and explain its *explananda*. Far from being an inference to the best explanation, this is not an inference at all. What's more, initial debates proceeded from necessary conditions for happiness, yet Augustine

183 Augustine, as author, has Monica respond by calling out a line of Ambrose "*foue precantes, Trinitas*," as the whole company is left "rejoicing and praising God" (*gaudentibus et laudantibus Deum, De beata v. 35-36*).

presents his final account as describing conditions which are both necessary and sufficient. The overarching argument of *De beata v.* leaves us with three choices: we may follow the scholarly majority in simply not looking for an overarching argument, we may declare *De beata v.* to be a failure when it comes to providing such an argument, or we may look for a model of argument that fits what we find in this text.

I suggest that the philosophical project articulated in *C. Acad.* provides a model for making sense of the big project in *De beata v.* We find the same general form, as an initial puzzle gives rise to aporetic debates followed by a passage of *oratio perpetua*. In the proceeding chapter, I argued that Augustine tailored the dialogue form to suit his own 'Platonist' method, which moves through three steps: aporetic debates un-teach problematic opinions and serve as the object of the *oratio perpetua*'s second-order reflection on what made these debates possible, while the findings of both provide a jumping off point for a great leap to a final *probabile* conclusion. We have already seen the aporetic quality of *De beata v.*'s debate and the reflection on the act of inquiry that emerged over the course of the work's second half. While Augustine does not explicitly employ the term *probabile* in presenting his concluding account of the Trinity, we find the same great leap from first- and second-order *vera* to a *probabile* or *veri simile* conclusion that does not follow in any strict sense.¹⁸⁴ If this is right, then we may try to read the overall argument of *De beata v.* in the same terms as that of *C. Acad.*¹⁸⁵

184 *C. Acad.* is the first work of the Cassiciacum set, and I take it to be programmatic in ways that the other works are not. In my chapter on *C. Acad.*, I argued that the absence of terms for *probabilia* in *De beata v.* and *De ord.* need not deter us from finding the same methodology at play.

185 The *oratio* that closes *De beata v.* is proportionally much shorter than the work's initial debates (25 paragraphs vs. 6, not counting dedications), as compared to *C. Acad.* (56 vs. 30) and *De ord.* (35 vs. 30), what's more, this *oratio perpetua* is interrupted at *De beata v.* 30 as Augustine quizzes his interlocutors for a piece of vocabulary, at 31 by a moment of chuckling, and 35 where Monica is moved to praise the Trinity. None of this, however, provides any reason to think that this *oratio perpetua* functions in a fundamentally different way than the others: in each, Augustine's basic task is to complete his three-stage method by reflecting on the act of inquiry and spelling out a *probabile* conclusion. When Augustine asks his companions for vocabulary in *De beata v.*, he has specific answers in mind, and it is Augustine, not his interlocutors, who controls the course of the current

The propaedeutic function of *De beata v.*

In the preceding chapter, I argued that *C. Acad.* pursues a fundamentally propaedeutic end. The intellectualism advocated by Augustine employs modes of thought far removed from everyday life, and for this reason the student must be made ready, or in Augustine's terms, *purified*, before engaging such doctrine directly. In *C. Acad.* such purification was carried out by means of a course of un-learning and self-reflective discovery, through which the student is meant to reject certain modes of thought and adopt others, all of this as a means of bringing him to perceive the world differently. When Augustine declared *C. Acad.*'s big conclusion to be *probabile*, he did not imply that his argument for it had gone off track; the point of the undertaking, rather, was to bring his students to *see* this conclusion as something 'worthy of approval' (*probabile*).

In the present chapter, we have traced *De beata v.*'s various self-reflective discoveries, yet it is still not clear what, if anything, has been 'un-learned,' nor is it apparent what exactly was meant to bring about a shift in perspective that would lead a student to see Augustine's final account of the Trinity as *probabile*. By approaching *De beata v.* with such questions in mind, we may recognize a subtext running through the inquiry into happiness that we have traced thus far. At the heart of the matter is Augustine's concept of measure, which is at once central to his

exposition. The chuckling, while it momentarily interrupts Augustine's discussion, does not alter its course. Monica's interruption, by contrast, signals the end of *oratio perpetua* and the start of the work's closing coda. We find similar codas at the end of the other dialogues, i.e. *C. Acad.* 3.44-45 and *De ord.* 2.53. As for differences in relative lengths, the exception sits not with *De beata v.*, I would argue, but with the other two works. *C. Acad.*, as Augustine's first work, is concerned with articulating methodology and situating Augustine's project *vis-à-vis* the philosophical tradition; it accomplishes this by presenting a secret history of the Academy, which in turn extends its closing *oratio*. See chapter 2. In *De ord.*, by contrast, Augustine has chosen to exemplify the rational activity of *divisio*, which he uses to structure his *oratio perpetua*; the result is that his discussion is much more full than it otherwise might have been. See chapter 4. Looking to Augustine's later dialogues, we find that *De beata v.* is closer to what we find in *De quantitate animae* (70 vs. 10), while *De Magistro* (32 vs. 14) and *De libero arbitrio* (99 vs. 66) come closer to the other Cassiciacum works. See chapter 5 for discussion of these later dialogues and the role of the *orationes* in them.

account of the Trinity and the sort of thing to strike the uninitiated as so much metaphysical nonsense. The problem in *De beata v.*, as in *C. Acad.*, is that everyday existence conditions us to empirical modes of thought that are antithetical to the intellectualist philosophy Augustine pursues.¹⁸⁶ Such modes of thought must be un-learned if one is to be able to think fruitfully about intellectualist doctrines such as Augustine's account of the Trinity.

The specific thing that must be un-learned in *De beata v.* is what 'having' means. We have seen already how debaters entertained the prospect of having different *objects* (secure things, wisdom and God), as they attempted to find scenarios which would fulfill the initial requirements for happiness. What's less obvious is that, thanks to Augustine's promptings, debaters have also (most likely unwittingly) entertained different notions of what it means for the *subject* to have something. This shift in what 'having' consists in explains the debates' otherwise needless repetition. On the first day [*De beata v.* 10-13], debaters tacitly assume a notion of having which is drawn from everyday experience, one which focuses on the object possessed, and they think about secure things, wisdom and God as possessions on par with any other. On the second day [17-22], Augustine forces this assumption to the surface, by interpreting Adeodatus' account in bluntly 'objective' ways. Augustine thus advances the overall line of inquiry by running Adeodatus' account into the ground. On the third day [23-29], debaters return to the beginning and revisit having secure things and wisdom, but this time their discussion begins from an analysis of the possessing subject's mind: the mind that can have secure things is the one that uses wisdom to rein in desires which cannot be fulfilled. Debaters proceed to revisit 'having wisdom' in this light, yet it is Augustine who brings this project to its fruition, and in his *oratio*

186 *C. Acad.* 3.38 credits the *consuetudo corporum* with the spread of the Stoic materialism. At *De beata v.* 36, Augustine claims that his account of the Trinity will be clear to intellectual people who have pushed back the shadows of superstition, cf. the dedication to *C. Acad.* 2, where superstition is identified with materialistic thought.

perpetua [30-36] he sets out an account of the mind which has wisdom as one that is 'perfected,' neither running into excesses of gluttony or falling into miserly deficiency. This is accomplished by the mind's conforming perfectly to its appropriate measure, which Augustine eventually identifies with Christ. Having wisdom and having God, at least God the Son, thus come out as the same. This model of the mind's conforming to its appropriate measure, which it may do either perfectly or imperfectly, in turn, provides Augustine the framework for explaining how a mind that is still imperfect may have God the Holy Spirit and be moved to make progress in coming to have God the Son.

In its broadest moves, *De beata v.* presents the gradual dawning of a new way of looking at things, as debaters begin to see moral psychological questions in terms of measure and structure. In a sense, the answer has been on the table since the beginning, as the first day's seemingly irrelevant banter about Trygetius' eating habits [7-9] introduced issues of measure and conformity, which at that point were applied to the body rather than the mind. Augustine's companions fail to make the requisite connections and their debate breaks down before such models may be successfully applied to questions of having wisdom and having God. Be that as it may, their debate (seemingly irrelevant bits included) has prepared them to hear what Augustine has to say. By leading them through a series of incomplete answers, unsolved puzzles, elation and distress, Augustine has begun a process of rewriting his companions' assents,¹⁸⁷ and thus of changing how they perceive the world. While this particular group of people may have been predisposed to accept accounts of the Trinity's role in happiness, by unlearning mundane notions about having, and by reflection on the act of inquiry, they have been prepared to see as *probabile*

¹⁸⁷ Augustine's appropriation of this Stoic technical terminology is set out explicitly in *C. Acad.* The basic idea is that one's set of assents (i.e. whatever one takes to be true) affects how one perceives the world, in particular what impressions or ideas strike one as worthy of approval (*probabile*). See chapter 2.

a particular account of the Trinity, one which would otherwise have struck them as so much nonsense. In this, the work's propaedeutic goal is achieved.

Conclusion

I have presented a reading of *De beata v.* which takes into account the entire text.¹⁸⁸ In so doing, I have responded to a problem which scholars normally avoid, viz. the shift from the debates' necessary conditions for happiness to the *oratio perpetua*'s account of necessary and sufficient ones. On my reading, the work does not set out to demonstrate the certain truth of this final account, but merely to prepare students, whether Augustine's interlocutors or readers, for thinking about it. This is accomplished by bringing individuals to perceive themselves and their place in the world via intellectualist terms of measure and structure.

Reason and emotion are not at odds in *De beata v.* Both are used in the process of rewriting debaters' assents, of changing how they perceive the world.¹⁸⁹ Nor do reason and emotion act in isolation from one another, rather both are brought under a single account as the mind's relation to Christ both supplies the basis of human rationality and generates the affective *admonitio* to seek a more perfect grasp of the truth.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, I have attempted to undermine the impression of *De beata v.* as a tidy set of neatly elaborated syllogisms. My reading brings out the aporetic and affective contours of the text and shows how they advance the work's overarching argument and propaedeutic goal. The presence of Stoic-inspired syllogistic can hardly be denied.¹⁹¹ Yet the *use* of syllogisms is relegated to the debate's first-

188 This is technically false, since I have yet to say anything about the work's dedication. I have however brought the debates and *oratio perpetua* under the auspices of a single project. I take all the dedications to the Cassiciacum dialogues to deal with the broader dialectic of the set. I will thus hold off discussing *De beata v.*'s dedication, which is quite important for themes of providence that do not surface until *De ord.* See chapter 4.

189 I part ways with Brian Stock, *Inner Dialogue*, who sees emotion as a hindrance to rational inquiry in this text.

190 Cf. Catherine Conybeare, *Irrational Augustine*, who looks for the emotional logic of this work, as something separate from its rational, dialectical structure.

191 See Sabine Harwardt, "Argumentationsmuster."

order project of sorting through common concepts. Such syllogisms are useful for articulating puzzles, yet they do not ultimately solve any. Progress is made through second-order reflection on the act of inquiry (with all its affective dimensions) and through the eventual jump from these various first- and second-order discoveries to a grand *probabile* conclusion about the Trinity's role in happiness.

In the end, dichotomies such as 'reason vs. emotion' or 'Classical optimism vs. Christian pessimism' are simply not useful for approaching this text. The first aims too low and fails to appreciate the scope of *De beata v.*'s project; the second applies to the text a level of detail that is simply not there. *De beata v.*'s concluding account is meant to outline the most basic mechanisms of human moral psychology. The possibility of human thought, inasmuch as it is founded on common concepts acquired from the Son, could be seen as an instance of 'general grace,' i.e. a gift from God to humanity in general.¹⁹² Christ, meanwhile, is presented as the mediator through which every human mind is connected to the *modus sine modo*. Whether or not some *special* grace is necessary for an individual to attain happiness by perfecting this relationship is simply not a question addressed in this text. Developmentalists and unitarians alike are thus left to argue *e silentio*, as they construct narratives of Augustine's progress or lack of progress in thinking about the requirements for happiness.

In a sense, Augustine's intellectualism is meant to provide the answer to questions which other schools of thought would ask if they thought through things long enough. We saw this in *C. Acad.*'s fanciful re-imagination of Hellenistic history, as Stoics are forced to accept skeptical conclusions, and skeptics are forced to accept the intellectualist doctrines of the Platonists who

¹⁹² *De beata v.* does not use the terminology of grace, although the notion of gift is clear enough. See *De beata v.* 35 for the ray (*iubar*) shining forth from the hidden sun, from which comes every truth that we speak.

end up saying the same thing as Catholic Christians. In presenting a relation to Christ as the human end, Augustine does not present a new end to the tradition of classical ethics; he endorses ends readily accepted by nearly all schools, albeit under a new description.¹⁹³ It is hardly groundbreaking for someone situated against the background of classical moral philosophy to claim that happiness amounts to having wisdom and becoming like God. This was readily agreed to by Stoics, Peripatetics, Platonists and (in a somewhat modified sense) Epicureans alike. Yet it is perhaps significant that debaters' initial formulation of this thesis is reduced to absurdity through the use of Stoic syllogistic. By reading *De beata v.*'s second day of debate in light of *C. Acad.*'s inter-school machinations, we find Augustine suggesting that Stoic or even Hellenistic philosophy in general is implicitly self-defeating *in a way that may prepare one for intellectualist alternatives*. The Stoics put forth the right conditions for happiness, yet they fail to realize that these conditions cannot be met given the materialist metaphysics and psychology that they also hold. In *De beata v.*, Augustine uses the Stoics' own syllogistic manner of argument to bring this short-coming to light.¹⁹⁴ But Augustine goes about this in a way that looks for continuity: even the Stoics have been the recipients of the Son's gift, which they themselves recognize as the common concepts that make rationality possible. The Stoics just weren't looking at these gifts in quite the right way. Insofar as *De beata v.* seeks continuity, it avoids the kinds of details that would be required to situate Augustine's early thoughts on happiness *vis-à-vis* his later, explicit discussions of Christ as Mediator and the necessity of special grace.

By situating *De beata v.* within the Platonist method articulated in *C. Acad.*, we find that *C. Acad.*'s methodological reflections are programmatic not just for *C. Acad.* but for *De beata v.*

193 Cf. Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse*.

194 In all of this, I refer to the Stoics only as they exist in Augustine's own presentation. For the short-comings of this presentation from a historical perspective, see chapter 2.

and, as I will go on to argue, for *De ord.* as well. By reading these three works as pursuing the same method, we begin to see how they form a set. In each case, the ultimate end is propaedeutic: each dialogue strives to change how we perceive the world. If we may extend the visual metaphor, we might understand the progress from one work to the next as a series of adumbrations, each filling out the last: *C. Acad.* brings people to see the intelligible features of the world; *De beata v.* brings into clearer focus what this entails when it comes to questions of human moral psychology. Whatever Augustine's own reasons for adopting such intellectualist positions may have been, the dialogues he wrote in the immediate aftermath of his famous conversion set out not to demonstrate the certain truth of those convictions but rather to prepare others for seeing these convictions as something worthy of adoption.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ My reading comes close to that of Therese Fuhrer, who suggests that the dialogues' debates begin from religious intuitions. Therese Fuhrer, "Augustins Frühdialoge als Inszenierung der Einheit von religiöser Praxis und philosophischem Dialog," in *Metaphysik und Religion*, ed. Theo Kobusch & Michael Erler (München, 2002): 309-322. Such a process is clearest in *De beata v.*, and my reading advances Fuhrer's suggestion by fleshing out the different ways in which these intuitions advance the project: such intuitions exemplify the affective pull of inquiry, which directs the course of *De beata v.*'s debate and provides central *explananda* for Augustine's eventual account of the Holy Spirit's *admonitio*.

CHAPTER 4

De ordine

Questions about providence appear in the dedications of all three Cassiciacum works, particularly that of *De beata v.*, yet it is not until *De ord.* that they become the explicit subject of debate.¹⁹⁶ This is one respect in which this final dialogue binds the set. In the previous chapters, I argued that the ultimate goal of *C. Acad.* was to bring about a change in perspective, to lead readers to recognize the existence of intelligible realities and their connection to them. *De beata v.* continued this process by bringing into focus the features of moral psychology by which the human mind is related to this intelligible reality and happiness is made possible. *De ord.* takes the next step, bringing the student to see what this relationship amounts to and suggesting ways in which one may improve it. In *De ord.* we find the 'Cassiciacum form' (aporetic debate followed by *oratio perpetua*) once again deployed in service of *C. Acad.*'s Platonist method: aporetic debates un-teach certain opinions, reflection on the act of debate secures self-reflective discoveries, and the results of both processes provide the jumping off point for an eventual *probabile* conclusion. Or so I will argue. *De ord.* departs from these earlier works, though, in that the role of Platonist teacher, which was attributed to the skeptical Academics in *C. Acad.* and taken up by Augustine in *De beata v.*, has passed from human hands all together. It is Providence herself who begins the work's 'Platonist' line of inquiry, as she sets out impasses through sensible

196 I will use both 'providence' and 'order' to translate the single Latin term, *ordo*. The term has a wide range of meanings within Augustine, not all of them directly moral. For wide-ranging discussions of such concepts, see Josef Rief, *Der Ordobegriff des jungen Augustinus* (Paderborn, 1962); Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboullic, *L'ordre caché*. I will be concerned with *ordo*, only insofar as it figures within *De ord.*'s overall argument, viz. 'the basic structural of the world by virtue of which the world is good for human beings.' See also Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboullic, "Dire l'ordre caché: Les discours sur l'ordre chez saint Augustin," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 52 (2006): 143-166. Here she argues that in *De ord.*, Augustine borrows strategies from biblical exegesis to describe the *ordo rerum* by engaging in analogical, apophatic, metaphorical and mimetic discourses.

phenomena. Or perhaps this role of Providence is not so much absent but latent in the previous works, and it is only in the last of the three that we find the reason why these dialogues (in opposition to Augustine's five other works in this form) are *scenic*.¹⁹⁷ Providence has been a character in and object of the debates all along, it is merely that her voice has not been explicitly noticed until this final work.

Getting puzzled

Over the course of *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, Augustine's students have made progress in the techniques of Augustine's 'Platonist' mode of study. The crucial move from first-order inquiry to second-order reflection on inquiry comes within the closing *oratio perpetua* of *C. Acad.*, and a similar move began to emerge within the debate of *De beata v.* A similar self-reflective turn, albeit on a much smaller scale, actually initiates the opening debate of *De ord.* This final work begins with a baroque *mis-en-scène*.¹⁹⁸ In the hours before dawn, Licentius shoos some mice, thus showing himself to be awake; Augustine asks about the odd alternating sound coming from a nearby ditch; Licentius explains that the cause is a cycle of clogging leaves which back up water and are then washed away, in turn.¹⁹⁹ Trygetius joins in as their little *schola* moves in short order to a discussion of causes in general; Licentius commits to the view that all things are held *in ordine*; he defends this claim against Augustine and eventually comes to thank

197 Which is to say that the conversations presented in these works are set in particular places at particular times. Bernd Reiner Voss, *Der Dialog*, 197, coins the term 'szenisch Dialog' to differentiate *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.* and *De ord.* from the rest of Augustine's works in this genre.

198 *De ord.* 1.6-19

199 "Therefore, when I saw that our school, as much as was present (for Alypius and Navigius had gone into town) was awake even at this hour, and since the waters' flowing admonished me to say something about it, I asked, 'What appears to you to be the cause of this sound alternating in such a way?'" (*Ergo ubi uidi scholam nostram, quantacumque aderat (nam Alypius et Nauigius in urbem ierat) etiam illis horis non sopitam et me cursus ille aquarum aliquid de se dicere admonebat: Quidnam uobis, inquam, uidetur esse causae, quod sic alternat hic sonus?*, *De ord.* 1.7). Schäfer reads this clogged ditch as a Platonist metaphor for evil as a disturbance in "the perpetual outflow of reality." Christian Schäfer, "Aqua haeret. A view on Augustine's technique of biographical self-observation in *De Ordine*," *Index Augustiniana* 51 (2001): 65-75. This kind of interpretation is not out of place in *De ord.* See below for my discussion of divination in *De ord.*

Providence (*ordo*) for bringing about their conversation about providence.²⁰⁰ While somewhat contrived, this scene demonstrates the facility Licentius has gained both when it comes to being drawn into puzzles and when it comes to resolving them through reflection on his own rational activity.²⁰¹ But he has not yet mastered the latter procedure, and when Augustine's little *schola* turns to debating Licentius' thesis that all things are contained *in ordine*, the young man is pulled away from self-reflection and approaches the task at hand in what we might think of as third-person terms.²⁰² Neither of Augustine's students has yet come to appreciate the indispensable role of his own rationality for intellectualist approaches to matters such as the question of providence undertaken here. As a result, their attempts to defend providence fall into one *aporia* after another, and no definite conclusion is reached until the final *oratio perpetua*, when Augustine brings the centrality of human reason back into focus.

200 “Then Licentius, jumping for joy out of bed, said, “Who could deny, Great God, that you govern all things by order? How all things hold fast together! With what calculated steps are all things moved along to their appropriate points of convergence! How many and what great things have been done so that we would say these things! What great things are being done so that we [might] find you! For from where but the order of things do these things flow, in fact are driven along, namely that we were awake, that you, Augustine, heard that sound, that you asked yourself about its cause, that you didn't find the cause of such a trifling thing? Indeed a field mouse has been shoed away so that I might be shown awake. Finally, your own expression, even when you were perhaps not the person in control of it, for what comes into each person's mind is not in his power, this expression was turned around in some way or other, so that it itself might teach me what I should say to you in response” (*Hic ille lecto etiam exiliens prae laetitia: Quis neget, Deus magne, inquit, te cuncta ordine administrare? Quam se omnia tenent! Quam ratis successionibus in nodos suos urgentur! Quanta et quam multa facta sunt, ut haec loqueremur! Quanta fiunt ut te inueniamus! Vnde enim hoc ipsum nisi ex rerum ordine manat et ducitur, quod euigilaui, quod illum sonum aduertisti, quod quaesisti tecum causam, quod tu causam tantillae rei non inuenisti? Sorex etiam prodiit, ut ego uigilans prodar. Postremo tuus etiam ipse sermo, te fortasse id non agente (non enim cuiquam in potestate est quid ueniat in mentem), sic nescio quomodo circumagitur, ut me ipse doceat, quid tibi debeam respondere, De ord. 1.14).*

201 “[Licentius said,] “but just now you gave me a great thing to wonder at.” What's that?” I asked. “That you were wondering about those matters of yours [i.e. the clogged ditch],” he said. “But what is the source from which wonder, or whatever the mother of this vice is, normally arise,” I asked, “if not some unaccustomed thing which is outside the manifest order of things?” He replied, “I accept [that something comes to be] outside the *manifest* order of things; for it seems to me that nothing can come to be outside of order” (*...sed modo plane dedisti mihi magnum mirari. – Quidnam hoc est?, inquam. – Quod tu, inquit, ista miratus es. – Vnde enim solet, inquam, oboriri admiratio aut quae huius uitii mater est nisi res insolita praeter manifestum causarum ordinem? – Et ille: Praeter manifestum, inquit, accipio; nam praeter ordinem nihil mihi fieri uidetur, De ord. 1.8).*

202 See Gareth Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, for discussion of first- vs. third-person philosophy.

Thinking about providence

De ord.'s debate, which is somewhat sprawling even by Cassiciacum standards, aims to explain how all things are contained within a single order that is good. The scope of 'all things' is not clearly defined, but it seems to begin by embracing all sensible things and gradually expand to include intelligible things such as wisdom.²⁰³ Progress is made as Augustine's students come to distinguish between three different models of order. The problem of evil is introduced in a number of different formulations, each time as a means of testing the model of order currently under consideration. Toward the end of this debate, Augustine breaks into a little *oratio perpetua*,²⁰⁴ during which he juxtaposes three models of order which his companions have been struggling to articulate. These three models provide different solutions to the problem of evil and different accounts of providence's role in bringing about their debate. It will suit our purposes merely to sketch these models and their applications.

The first model explains the whole by tracing the connections between individual parts.

For what is more loathsome than an executioner? What more savage and awful than that soul? But he holds a necessary place within the laws themselves, and he is inserted into the order of a well moderated city. He is guilty in his own soul, yet through an external order he [becomes] a penalty for [other] guilty people. What can be said to be more sordid, more bereft of seemliness and full of disgrace than prostitutes, pimps and other plagues of this sort? Remove prostitutes from human affairs and you will throw all things into confusion through lusts; place them in a position of lawful wives and you will be disgraced with taint of ill-repute.

Quid enim carnifice tetrius? Quid illo animo truculentius atque dirius? At inter ipsas leges locum necessarium tenet et in bene moderatae ciuitatis ordinem inseritur estque suo animo nocens, ordine autem alieno poena nocentium. Quid sordidius, quid inanius decoris et turpitudinis plenius meretricibus, lenonibus caeterisque hoc genus pestibus dici potest? Aufer meretrices de rebus humanis, turbaueris omnia libidinibus; constitue matronarum loco, labe ac dedecore dehonestaueris (De ord. 2.12).

203 See the discussion of wisdom and folly at *De ord.* 2.4-5, 8-10.

204 *De ord.* 2.12-13. The term 'little *oratio perpetua*' is mine. The debate resumes after this interlude, and continues until reaching a final *aporia*, at which point Augustine moves into the extended *oratio perpetua* which takes up the last third of the work (*De ord.* 2.24-54).

On this model, Providence is like a just ruler who gives each individual his due, whether good or ill, and thus balances out the scales of retributive justice. This is accomplished through orchestrating events, putting bloodthirsty individuals into situations where they can act out their shameful desires and punish the guilty in the process. When it comes to explaining the providential occasioning of *De ord.*'s debate, this model looks to the same orchestration of events: the farmer plants the tree; the tree drops its leaves; the leaves clog the ditch; the ditch makes a noise; the noise annoys Augustine; Augustine asks Licentius about the noise's cause, and so on. The good of the whole is the sum of the goods of the parts, and explaining this goods consists in a process of tracing causal chains.

The second model seeks to explain the whole as a harmony of opposed parts. Poetry offers the main example.

Poets are exceedingly fond of what they call solecisms and barbarisms. Yet they prefer to change their names and call them tropes and metaplasms rather than avoid such obvious flaws of language. But take these away from poems and we will long for these most delightful spices. Collect many of them into a single place, and I will feel nauseous about a whole that is pungent, stinking and rank... Who does not fear lying conclusions or those that creep little by little through subtraction or addition into assent to falsity? Who does not hate them? Yet in certain arguments, when set in their appropriate places, these often have such force, that somehow the deception accomplished through them becomes sweet.

Solecismos et barbarismos quos uocant, poetae adamauerunt quae schemata et metaplasmos mutatis appellare nominibus quam manifesta uitia fugere maluerunt. Detrahe tamen ista carminibus, suauissima condimenta desiderabimus. Congere multa in unum locum, totum acre, putidum, rancidum fastidibo... Mentientes conclusiones aut irrepentes paulatim uel minuendo uel addendo in assensionem falsitatis quis non metuat, quis non oderit? Saepe tamen in disputationibus certis et suis sedibus collocatae tantum ualent, ut nescio quomodo per eas dulcescat ipsa deceptio (De ord. 2.13).

Providence is like a good poet or orator who adds charm to a work through the inclusion of solecisms, barbarisms and fallacies. On this model, individual evils are defeated within a broader

whole, and the whole is made better by their presence. This is the kind of thinking behind redemption stories: the sinner who repents and is better for having overcome his wicked ways.²⁰⁵ When it comes to occasioning inquiry, *De ord.* 1.25-26 offers the somewhat homier example of a cock fight, which catches the attention of our debaters on their way to the bath. They are enthralled by the scene, how the victor caws and struts, lording over his opponent who slides away with downcast posture. As with the mice at the work's opening, this encounter with some chickens causes our debaters to reflect on the extent of beauty and the *lex naturae* spread throughout the world.

The first two models describe various kinds of wholes. The third model looks to the ultimate conditions of any whole's existence as a whole. In offering this model, Augustine gives the first significant hint at the work's eventual Platonist conclusion. According to this model, all things are held *in ordine* insofar as they participate in an intelligible paradigm. Augustine looks to the mathematical sciences for instances of sensible wholes structured by intelligible number.

Now in music, in geometry, in astronomy, in the relationships between numbers, order has such dominion that if anyone should want to see its 'font and inner sanctuary,' he would either find it in these or he would be led there through these without any error. Such education, if one uses it moderately (for nothing is to be more feared in these matters than excess), will nourish a soldier of philosophy, or even a general of such a sort, that he will fly up to where he wants to be and arrive at that highest measure, beyond which he neither can nor ought to ask for anything else; and he will lead many to that place from which even now, while held by human affairs, he will look down on and discern such matters so that it will in no way disturb him that one person wants to have children but has none, while another is tortured by his wife's excessive fecundity.

Iam in musica, in geometria, in astrorum motibus, in numerorum necessitatibus ordo ita dominatur, ut, si quis quasi eius fontem atque ipsum penetrare uidere desideret, aut in his inueniat, aut per haec eo sine ullo errore ducatur. Talis enim eruditio, si quis ea moderate utatur (nam nihil ibi quam nimium formidandum est), talem philosophiae militem nutrit

205 We might see the contrast between Augustine's first two part-whole relationships as the difference between what modern theodiscists capture in the distinction between 'balancing off' goods and evils and 'defeating' them within greater wholes. See Roderick Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. M. M. Adams & R. M. Adams (Oxford, 1990): 53-68.

uel etiam ducem, ut ad summum illum modum, ultra quod requirere aliquid nec possit nec debeat nec cupiat, qua uult, euolet atque perueniat multosque perducatur, unde iam, dum ipsis humanis rebus teneatur, sic eas despiciat cunctaque discernat, ut nullo modo eum moueat cur alius optet liberos habere nec habeat, alius uxoris nimia fecunditate torqueatur (De ord. 2.13).

While the mathematical sciences provide examples of sensible wholes structured by intelligible number, they do not provide the only examples. According to Augustine, an understanding of number allows one to explain how it is good that the person who wants children lacks them and *vice versa*. While this may strike us as implausible, Augustine is offering only the broadest suggestion. We can fill this out somewhat if we trace the progression through these three models. It might be that the person who doesn't want children but has many is being justly punished for some crime. Meanwhile, there might be some kind of harmonious good in the chiasmic relation of having but not wanting and wanting but not having. Whatever the actual explanation ends up being, the point is that *any* explanation conforming to the first or second model presupposes some relation to intelligible paradigms. Both models describe wholes, yet there can be a whole (so the third model has it) only if there is unity for these parts to participate in. This is a rather big claim. Having suggested it to his students, Augustine leaves them to draw out its implications for their discussion of providence. But the task proves too much for them, Augustine's students fall back on a muddled version of the first two models, and their debate crashes into *aporia*.

The key to fitting this debate into *De ord.*'s bigger project sits in two points. First, is that Augustine's third model assigns to human beings two different relations to intelligible unity. Like everything else in the sensible world, a human being belongs to wholes that participate in unity. A human individual is enmeshed within various causal chains, his body embraces harmonious proportions between its parts, there may be various sins which he has integrated into his life. Yet

we could say the same, or at least something analogous about chickens, mice and leaves. Human beings stand apart from the rest of the sensible world insofar as they are capable of *understanding* the intelligible unity behind these wholes. The other key point is that Augustine's students have been employing this capacity throughout their debate. While a mouse or some chickens might catch a cat's attention, they will not move a cat to reflect on the order and beauty that structure the world. This is a mark of humanity's special relation to unity. By entertaining different models of providence, debaters exemplify the human capacity to think about the world's basic structures, and by letting mice and a ditch draw them into this discussion, debaters illustrate the human capacity to be drawn into inquiry by sensible experience. It is by reflecting on these rational human activities that Augustine will move his companions beyond *aporia*.

The providence of thought

In *C. Acad.*, Augustine sets out a method, heavily indebted to Academic practice, in which certain truths (*vera*) arrived at through self-reflection provide the spring board for jumping to a final conclusion which is 'truth-like' (*veri simile*) or 'worthy of approval' (*probabile*). Augustine himself employed this method in both *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, as we've seen.²⁰⁶ We find the same set of moves in *De ord.*: that human beings are able to think about the world's structures, and that they are capable of being drawn into inquiry by sensible experience are the self-reflective *vera* from which Augustine moves to his final *veri simile* / *probabile* conclusion. This conclusion takes the form of a psychological account, put forth by *doctissimi viri*, claiming that the sensible world is structured by the same intelligible unity that human beings use to think about the world (and anything else for that matter).²⁰⁷ As in *De beata v.*, this conclusion is not

²⁰⁶ See chapter 2 for reconstruction of this method, and chapters 2 & 3, respectively, for its application.

²⁰⁷ *De ord.* 2.31, 49. See discussion below.

presented in explicit terms of *probabilia* or *veri similia*, but the structure of the argument is the same as that in *C. Acad.*, and I take Augustine to be drawing a conclusion of the same epistemic status, i.e. as *probabile*. If this is right, the point of the various arguments leading up to *De ord.*'s conclusion is not to demonstrate its certain truth, but to bring about a change in how debaters, and by extension readers, perceive themselves and their place in the world, with the ultimate goal of bringing them to see Augustine's concluding account as worthy of approval.

Unity is at the heart of this final account. Augustine's *doctissimi viri* distinguish between 'reason' (*ratio*), i.e. the power of the mind by which things are divided and combined,²⁰⁸ 'rational things' (*rationalia*) which use or can use reason, and 'reasonable things' (*rationabilia*) which are made through the use of reason.²⁰⁹ Unity is cited as the goal of reason's dividing and combining (in each case, reason seeks a conception which is whole), while in the same breath, Augustine argues that no thing can exist unless it is one thing.²¹⁰ Some connection to unity is a necessary condition for the existence of any given thing, although human beings, as rational beings, occupy a special position insofar as we use the same unity to think about the world that God (or perhaps the World Soul) uses to create it.²¹¹

Over the course of the work, we find a shift in purpose. At the beginning, debaters set out

208 *Ratio est mentis motio ea quae discuntur distinguendi et connectendi potens* (*De ord.* 2.30).

209 "But since most learned men are accustomed most subtly to distinguish between the rational and the 'reasonable,' this should in no way be passed over when it comes to our present purpose. For they said that the rational is that which uses or can use reason, while the reasonable is that which is made or said by means of reason. And thus we can say that these baths and our conversation are reasonable, while we say that the person who built them or we ourselves are rational" (*Sed quoniam solent doctissimi uiri, quid inter rationale et rationabile intersit, acute subtiliterque discernere, nullo modo est ad id quod instituimus negligendum. Nam rationale esse dixerunt, quod ratione uteretur uel uti posset, rationabile autem, quod ratione factum esset aut dictum. Itaque has balneas rationabiles possumus dicere nostrumque sermonem, rationales autem uel illum qui has fecit, uel nos qui loquimur, De ord.* 2.30-31).

210 *De ord.* 2.48.

211 On my reading at least, not only human artifacts but natural objects, systems and events end up being 'reasonable.' The structuring presence of unity in all such things is what ultimately secures the intelligibility of the sensible world. For discussion of the World Soul, see below.

to find an account of providence which will allow them to defend the thesis that all things are contained *in ordine*; by the end, this goal has been eclipsed as Augustine delves deeper and deeper into the psychological underpinnings of human rationality, in an attempt to fill out *De beata v.*'s account of how one may perfect his mind's relation to intelligible reality.²¹² In that work, the intelligible world was treated under the heading of Christ the *modus animi*; *De ord.* prefers talk of unity; yet in either case the big goal is the same: happiness.²¹³ Questions of providence end up presenting a particularly good way to think about this relation between the mind and unity, for as we shall see, such questions engage the mind's special relationship to the first principle of all things, and having engaged that relationship, one may then take it as the object of a further, self-reflective course of inquiry. In this way, *De ord.* presents a human soul inquiring into itself, its capacities, and its relation to the basic structures of the world.

Augustine's ultimate goal is practical. The point of understanding the human mind's

212 This is particularly clear in the discussion of the *doctissimi uiri* and their views of reason at *De beata v.* 30-31. Reason is that, "which only the rarest kind of man is able to use as a guide to understand God or the soul that is within us or the soul that is everywhere [i.e. the World-soul], since it is difficult for each person who has slipped into the affairs of sensible things to return to himself. And thus although men strive among these deceptive things to act with reason, only a very few know what reason is and what kind of thing" (...*qua duce uti ad Deum intelligendum uel ipsam quae aut in nobis aut usque quaque est animam, rarissimum omnino genus hominum potest non ob aliud nisi quia in istorum sensuum negotia progressu redire in semetipsum cuique difficile est. Itaque cum in rebus ipsis fallacibus ratione totum agere homines moliantur, quid sit ipsa ratio et qualis sit, nisi perpauci prorsus ignorant, De ord.* 2.30). What's more, "it moves us very much, that 'man' was defined by the ancients as 'an animal, mortal, rational.' Once the genus, 'animal,' has been posited, we see that two differentiae have been added, by which, I believe, man was meant to be warned of both where he should return and from where he should flee. For since the soul has fallen and progressed all the way to mortal things, it ought thus to return to reason; by one word, reason, man is separated from the beasts, by another word, mortal, from divine things. Therefore, unless the soul holds to reason, it will be a beast, and unless it turn himself from mortal things, it will not be divine." (...*illud nos mouere maxime debet, quod ipse homo a ueteribus sapientibus ita definitus est: homo est animal rationale mortale. Hic genere posito, quod animal dictum est, uidemus additas duas differentias, quibus, credo, admonendus erat homo et quo sibi redeundum esset et unde fugiendum. Nam ut progressus animae usque ad mortalia lapsus est, ita regressus esse in rationem debet; uno uerbo a bestiis, quod rationale, alio a diuinis separatur, quod mortale dicitur. Illud igitur nisi tenuerit, bestia erit, hinc nisi se auerterit, diuina non erit, De ord.* 2.31).

213 I suggest that Augustine's terminological variety may stem from the phrase 'measure, number and weight' from Wisdom 11:12. *C. Acad.* looks to the dual weight of reason and authority, *De beata v.* moves to an investigation of Christ / Wisdom as the *modus animi*, and *De ord.* considers intelligible number / unity as the first principle of all things.

relation to the intelligible world is to improve this relation. This project relies ultimately on the role of unity as a cause: it is unity as a goal which drives the processes of rational thought, and it is unity which unifies natural objects, giving them existence and binding them together into organized wholes. A human being is able to bring his mind into a special relation to this unity, and thus allow unity to exercise its structuring power on the mind itself. Through this, the mind is unified, or in *De beata v.*'s terms, 'perfected' and made happy. The possibility of such a relationship is a fundamental feature of what makes the world good for human beings. Whatever a correct account of providence ends up being, in the end it will have to incorporate this relationship between the human mind and the intelligible world.

A *probabile* conclusion? Un-learning and self-discovery

C. Acad. and *De beata v.* set out to un-teach certain empiricist modes of thought born of our day-to-day experience of the physical world. This process is continued in *De ord.*, where the problem addressed is how we think about unity. Normal ideas of wholes composed of parts hardly prepare us to appreciate what Augustine is getting at with his account of intelligible unity. *De ord.* thus sets out a curriculum of un-learning and self-discovery, in an effort to bring us to see Augustine's account of unity as *probabile*. A good deal of demystification is accomplished through *De ord.*'s reflections on rational activity: the search for unity, in the most basic terms, involves removing what is foreign and combining what is appropriate. This occurs when the mind seeks definitional knowledge of any given object, searching out descriptions which are neither too narrow nor too wide. The mind is thus *more* unified simply to the degree that its definitional conceptions of things are correct. Yet through *De ord.*'s self-reflective turn, we are presented with a mind (i.e. Augustine's) looking to unify its conception of itself. This establishes

the straightforward point that the human mind differs from the sensible objects which it thinks about, *insofar as it has this capacity*.²¹⁴ What underlies this capacity is an open question, one which Augustine responds to with his final account of intelligible unity.

The weight of this *explanandum* is easier to feel for those who have made their way through *De ord.*'s winding aporetic debates. The process begins, as we've seen, with a moment of self-reflection as Licentius credits Providence for bringing Licentius and his companions into a conversation about providence. Yet the young man quickly loses hold of the special role that he as a human being plays in this story, and when he tries to articulate *how* all things are held in order, he falls back on accounts of the (sensible) causal nexus, treating leaves, mice and men as links within a causal chain.²¹⁵ Assumptions born of everyday life have blinded Licentius to the intellectual / rational dimensions of this opening scene and lead him to treat sensible things, human beings and God as though they were all on par.

Providence begins to un-teach this way of thinking about things, simply insofar as she presents Licentius with a scenario that appropriately puzzles him. Through further questioning, Augustine realizes what is holding the young man back, and takes up the role as teacher, leading their debate forward as he proceeds from one puzzle to another.²¹⁶ In the end, debaters are left in a rather majestic *aporia*, as they are weighed down with competing accounts of the world's order and no sense of how to adjudicate between them.²¹⁷ But despite all that, the discussion eventually

214 Cf. *Sol.*, where Augustine attempts to establish through self-reflection that the human mind differs from the intelligible realities which it uses.

215 See Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned," for a different analysis of the insight that Licentius gained at the start and why he lost it.

216 Questions of theodicy, which scholars such as Michael Foley, "Cicero and Augustine," and Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*, have taken to be the main subject matter of *De ord.*, are used in this process of stripping back Licentius and Trygetius' levels of assumptions. See also the somewhat over-translated title of the work's most up-to-date English translation: Robert Russel, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil: A Translation of St. Augustine's De Ordine* (New York, 1942).

217 See *De ord.* 2.19-23 for the final breakdown of their debate. Licentius' reaction to this *aporia* is particularly marked: "But Licentius, in wonder and annoyed because his good cause had so quickly slipped from his hands,

winds its way back to questions of human rationality and drives home the point that some account must be given of humanity's special status within the world's providential order. Through the double sting of *aporia* and *explanandum*, debaters are prepared for Augustine's concluding account of intelligible unity.

There is a degree of manipulation at work here, as we might expect from a recent teacher of rhetoric, yet the issues Augustine raises are real: the projects of explaining the world's basic structure and identifying how it is that humans differ from non-rational animals are at the heart of our own hard sciences. While the quasi-Platonist account Augustine eventually offers is unlikely to win many converts today, his framing of the question and his methodological thoughts on how to address it reach a level of sophistication which is seldom matched even in our own time of critical self-awareness.

De ordine as a methodological work

According to *De ord.*'s closing account, the structuring power of unity is ubiquitous. As a result, literally anything can serve as a starting point for a *De ord.*-style course of self-reflective inquiry. The liberal disciplines provide a relatively easy place to start, insofar as they give us opportunities to use our reason and thus engage our capacity for intelligible unity.²¹⁸ In studying music, geometry or astronomy, we use number to describe the world; having done so, we may then turn and ask how it was we were able to do this. In the liberal arts generally, we use reason

said, "I don't know how the thought, which I now despise, got away from me." ... And since I [Augustine] was repeatedly explaining this and laying it out for Licentius, and he was either not understanding or pretending not to understand, he had nothing which he could say in response and gave himself over to silence" (*Et ille [Licentius] admirans ac moleste ferens, quod tam repente bona causa esset lapsa de manibus... Nescio quomodo mihi, inquit, effugit quam nunc sperno sententiam... Quod cum siue non intellegenti siue dissimulanti se intellexisse uersarem [Augustinus] saepius et euoluerem, nihil habuit quod diceret et se silentio dedit, De ord. 2.23*).

218 For Augustine's discussion of the liberal arts, see *De ord.* 2.35-38; for the application of liberal study to Augustine's Platonist curriculum, see *De ord.* 2.39-46; for the possibility of doing without the liberal arts, see *De ord.* 2.47 and my discussion below.

in the search for definitions, and once we have divided what is alien and combined what is akin, we may turn and ask how it was we could accomplish this. The liberal disciplines themselves constitute structured bodies of knowledge, providing the student attempting to master them ample opportunity to run through the same rational procedures that were originally used to found these disciplines.²¹⁹

It is worth asking what exactly is at stake here. Augustine's model of inquiry, as I've reconstructed it, distinguishes between the first-order contents of a liberal discipline (e.g. various propositions about poetic meters, the relation between the internal angles of triangles, and so on) and second-order discoveries about the rational capacities of human beings. What ultimately matters for Augustine's project is this second-order knowledge, which one can obtain *whether or not he is successful in his first-order undertakings*. Augustine's idea is not that knowledge of the liberal disciplines is somehow necessary for inferring or piecing together knowledge of the rational mind: it is the *activity* of reasoning not the *conclusions* of reasoning, that is needed to advance this project. And one may reason just as well, whether he arrives at correct first-order knowledge, or makes some progress but stops short of his goal, or simply suspends judgment when it comes to such first-order questions altogether.

My reading runs counter to the tacit yet widespread assumption that when Augustine asks a question, it is because he wants to answer that particular question. The reflective turn at the heart of Augustine's method drives a wedge between the one-to-one relation of a question to its

219 *De ord.* 2.35-43 presents a narrative in which *Ratio* creates the various liberal arts. Having set out grammar (*De ord.* 2.35-37), *Ratio* stops to reflect on her activities: "Thus when grammar had been perfected and laid out, Reason was admonished to seek and attend to the power itself by which she gave birth to this art. For by defining, dividing and combining, she had not only arranged and ordered grammar, but had also defended it from every falsity that might creep in" (*Illa igitur ratio, perfecta dispositaque grammatica, admonita est quaerere atque attendere hanc ipsam uim, qua peperit artem. Nam eam definiendo, distribuendo, colligendo non solum digresserat atque ordinauerat, uerum ab omni etiam falsitatis irreptione defenderat, De ord.* 2.38). Cf. my discussion of dialectic, below.

answer, insofar as it opens up the possibility that one (first-order) question may be asked as a means of answering a different (second-order) question. All that is required for this 'means' is the act of rationally engaging this first question: the inquirer need merely look for an answer; whether or not he finds one is beside the point. It does not follow from this that Augustine is somehow averse to answering his initial questions. In fact, the dialogue's initial first-order questions and their eventual self-reflective conclusions are often intimately related.²²⁰ Yet I hope to have shown that it is a substantive question, *why* it is Augustine asks the various questions that he asks, and *which* of them are meant to be answered by the works he has presented to us.

This model of first-order skepticism and second-order certainty makes good sense of *De ord.*'s ultimate stance on providence. As we've seen, the work entertains three different accounts of providence without adjudicating between them, although it is clear by the end that whatever a correct account of providence ends up being, it must include human beings' special connection to intelligible unity. In other words, *De ord.* takes no definitive stance on the first-order question of what a correct account of providence is, yet the fact that Augustine and his companions can think about such issues and are drawn to do so by sensible experience grounds various second-order claims about human rationality. These second-order claims, in turn, will be useful for the eventual resolution of the first-order question about providence, although Augustine does not return to this question in *De ord.*²²¹

This same model also makes sense of the course of liberal study that Augustine lays out in *De ord.*'s closing *oratio*. Scholars have taken this discussion, in conjunction with

220 See chapter 5 for discussion.

221 This view of *De ord.* as heavily aporetic is not universally shared. Michael Foley, *Dissertation*, seems content with the account of providence provided in *De ord.*; Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned," suggests that an account has been found, although Licentius has trouble articulating it. I take such readings to conflate the three different accounts put forth in *De ord.* Jörg Treleberg, *De ordine*, rightly admits that Augustine does not ultimately present a theodicy in *De ord.*

Retractationes 1.6, to announce a program of works dedicated to each of the liberal arts.²²² But here too it is a substantive question as to *why* Augustine is interested in such a project. I suggest that it is not the case that Augustine thinks systematic first-order knowledge of the various liberal disciplines is necessary for attaining wisdom, but that as unified bodies of knowledge, these *disciplinae* provide a ready object for the self-reflective form of inquiry advanced in *De ord.*

This is borne out in an astonishing passage, *De ord.* 2.47. Having set out a complete course of liberal study, Augustine presents a series of abridged curricula for those who lack the time and resources for a full course of liberal study. Such people should learn just dialectic and the power of numbers (*potentia numerorum*), i.e. arithmetic. Failing this, one should learn dialectic *or* arithmetic. And if even this proves too much, one should “know unity (*quid sit unum in numeris*) perfectly and what it is capable of, not in that highest law and highest order of all things, but in those things which we constantly perceive and do in everyday life.”²²³ The different disciplines are not on par. Augustine has already introduced dialectic as the *disciplina disciplinarum*, which structures the other disciplines, and at *De ord.* 2.38 he presents Reason,

222 Augustine announces that he completed one book *De Grammatica*, which was subsequently lost, as well as six books *De Musica*. (*Sed earum solum de grammatica librum absoluere potui, quem postea de armario nostro perdidit, et de musica sex uolumina, quantum adinet ad eandem partem, quae rythmus uocatur*). See Vivian Law, “St. Augustine’s “De grammatica” : Lost or Found?” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 19 (1984): 155-183; William Jordan, “Augustine on Music,” in *Grace, Politics and Desire: Essays on Augustine*, ed. Hugo Anthony Meynell (Calgary, 1990): 123-135.

223 “And so that no one thinks that we have embraced too wide a project, I say [now] more plainly and briefly that no one ought to aspire to understand these things without the ‘double knowledge’ of good disputation <i.e. dialectic> and the power of numbers. And if anyone thinks that this is still too much, let him know as well as possible numbers alone or only dialectic. And if this <task> is unending, let him know unity (*quid sit unum*) perfectly and what it is capable of, not in that highest law and highest order of all things, but in those things which we constantly perceive and do in everyday life. For indeed the very discipline of philosophy receives this learning and finds in it nothing more than unity, albeit in a far loftier and more divine way” (*Et ne quisquam latissimum aliquid nos complexos esse arbitretur, hoc dico planius atque breuius, ad istarum rerum cognitionem neminem aspirare debere sine illa quasi duplici scientia bonae disputationis potentiaeque numerorum. Si quis etiam hoc plurimum putat, solos numeros optime nouerit aut solam dialecticam. Si et hoc infinitum est, tantum perfecte sciat, quid sit unum in numeris quantumque ualeat nondum in illa summa lege summoque ordine rerum omnium, sed in his quae quotidie passim sentimus atque agimus. Excipit enim hanc eruditionem iam ipsa philosophiae disciplina et in ea nihil plus inuenit quam quid sit unum, sed longe altius longeque diuinius, De ord. 2.47.)*

momentarily personified, as creating dialectic by reflecting on the activities she engaged in when creating the discipline of grammar.²²⁴ These acts amount to dividing what is alien and combining what is akin. Augustine's abridgments show us that first-order study in grammar, poetry, music, geometry and astronomy can be passed over entirely, since the student can get what he needs from the second-order disciplines of dialectic and arithmetic, and in a real pinch, either one will do. It is with the final abridgment that we discover that what was at stake all along is knowledge of unity (*unum in numeris*).²²⁵ With this, Augustine's proposed works on the liberal disciplines are integrated into the Cassiciacum project. As *De ord.* has shown us, for the mind to know unity (in the fullest sense at least) is for it to perfect its relationship to the intelligible world; and as *De beata v.* has shown us, it is in such a relationship that the soul attains happiness as it is perfectly structured by the intelligible *modus animi*, Christ.

This series of abridgments puts Augustine's project into the right light. The first-order disciplines of grammar, poetry, music, geometry and astronomy are in fact useful for coming to knowledge of the second-order disciplines, dialectic and arithmetic, insofar as the act of thinking through these first-order disciplines illustrates the kinds of activities that make up these second-

224 "Thus when grammar had been perfected and laid out, Reason was admonished to seek and attend to the power itself by which she gave birth to this art. For by defining, dividing and combining, she had not only arranged and ordered grammar, but had also defended it from every falsity that might creep in. How then could she proceed to creating other things unless it first distinguished its own devices and tools, as it were, noted and divided them, and brought forth the discipline of dialectic itself. Dialectic teaches how to teach; dialectic teaches how to learn. In dialectic, reason shows herself and lays bare what she is, what she seeks, what she is capable of. Reason knows how to know; she alone not only wants to make people knowers, but she is able to do so" (*Illa igitur ratio, perfecta dispositaque grammatica, admonita est quaerere atque attendere hanc ipsam vim, qua peperit artem. Nam eam definiendo, distribuendo, colligendo non solum digesserat atque ordinauerat, uerum ab omni etiam falsitatis irreptione defenderat. Quando ergo transiret ad alia fabricanda, nisi ipsa sua prius quasi quaedam machinamenta et instrumenta distingueret, notaret, digereret proderetque ipsam disciplinam disciplinarum, quam dialecticam uocant? Haec docet docere, haec docet discere; in hac se ipsa ratio demonstrat atque aperit, quae sit, quid uelit, quid ualeat. Scit scire, sola scientes facere non solum uult, sed etiam potest, De ord. 2.38*)

225 I take Augustine's talk of numbers to refer to the discipline of arithmetic and his talk of unity to refer to something else. Otherwise, Augustine would be suggesting that those who do not have time to learn dialectic or arithmetic should learn arithmetic.

order ones. This is borne out in the one treatise Augustine did actually compose, *De Musica* [*De mus.*], which spends five books discussing poetic meter and the sixth investigating what kind of relation between human mind and intelligible number must have been in place in order for him to have done all this.²²⁶ Be that as it may, study of these first-order disciplines is by no means necessary, and one may skip over them if need be. Likewise, the second-order disciplines of arithmetic and dialectic are useful insofar as they allow the mind to engage with unity fairly directly. Augustine himself demonstrates this in *De ord.*, as he uses the dialectical technique of *divisio* to structure his *oratio perpetua*,²²⁷ and then reflects on the rational activities that allowed him to undertake such an endeavor. But these second-order disciplines are in the end also unnecessary, and Augustine suggests that when time is really short, one can approach unity by simply noticing its structuring activities “in those things which we constantly perceive and do in everyday life.” In the end, one can bypass the liberal disciplines altogether, since sensible experience provides a sufficient starting-point for *De ord.*'s approach to self-reflective inquiry. With this Augustine throws open the Academy's gates and brings his Platonist method out into the world at large.

Providence as a Platonist teacher

Augustine's various abridgments of the liberal curriculum make it clear that sensible experience itself provides a suitable starting point for Platonist study, while the work's closing account of intelligible unity offers an explanation for why this is so. Given that the structuring

226 This is a substantive claim on my part, which explains the otherwise strange change in mode of inquiry at the end of *De mus.* While this is not marked by a shift from debate to *oratio perpetua*, this change in apparent subject matter is quite clear, and I argue that the Cassiciacum method (aporetic debate, reflection and *probabile* conclusion) may be usefully applied, even if we do not find the specific Cassiciacum form (aporetic debate followed by *oratio perpetua*). Cf. my discussion of *Conf.* in chapter 5.

227 See Appendix for my *divisio textus*.

power of unity extends to everything there is,²²⁸ inquiry into literally anything provides the rational mind an opportunity to exercise its own special connection to intelligible unity, as it attempts to uncover the unity in whatever its immediate object of study happens to be. We can start pulling together the various strands of *De ord.*'s argument if we recognize that this closing account responds to an *explanandum* that was set out at the very start of the text. The debates of *De ord.* did not begin from an impasse designed by any human teacher. It was Providence herself who first led Licentius and Augustine down the winding path of Platonist inquiry, with all its unlearning and self-discovery. In choosing to begin the work in this way, Augustine, as author, presents Providence as a Platonist teacher, confronting her students with puzzles about themselves and their place in the world. The debates of *De ord.* are all an attempt to make sense of what happened in this opening scene.

De ord.'s *mis-en-scène* presents a bizarre combination of the mundane and the speculative, of plumbing problems and cosmology. This odd union results from the mode of human/divine interaction that Augustine, as author, adopts. Rather than personifying Providence and making her simply another interlocutor,²²⁹ Augustine lets Providence speak through various divinatory practices.²³⁰ Licentius' grand commitment to *ordo* is arrived at through a mishearing²³¹

228 See *De ord.* 2.48, cited above.

229 Cf. *Sol.* where Reason is Augustine's interlocutor, or *Conf.* 8.27 where Continence appears in personified form.

230 Cicero's *De divinatione* brings out the significance of these various practices. Hagendahl claims that Augustine had not read *De div.* at this point in his life. Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Göteborg, 1967). Yet Hagendahl does not consider *De ord.* 1.15, "It appears now that you don't know, my dear young man, how many things have been said against divination and by what sort of men" (*Hic apparet te, inquam, nescire, adolescens, quam multa et a qualibus uiris contra diuinationem dicta sint*). This strikes me, at least, as a fairly clear reference to *De div.* 2 in which Marcus Cicero gives an Academic response to the Stoic arguments for divination, which his brother Quintus Cicero presents in *De div.* 1. See also Karin Schlapbach, "Divination, Wissen und Autorität in Augustins Cassiciacum-Dialogen," *Museum Helveticum* 62 (2005): 84-98; Wolfgang Hübner, "Der Ordo der Realien in Augustins Frühdialog *De ordine*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 33 (1987): 23-48. For discussion of *De ord.*'s various divinatory 'signs,' see Jean Doignon, "L'émergence de la notion d' "ordre très secret" dans les premiers Dialogues d'Augustin. Son incidence sur l'approche de Dieu," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 42 (1996): 243-253.

231 At *De ord.* 1.8 Augustine makes the rather bland claim that things *praeter manifestum causarum ordinem* often cause fascination (*admiratio*). From Augustine's standpoint the stress here is on '*manifestum*,' yet it is '*ordinem*'

which functions as an omen;²³² Licentius treats the mouse's seeking its hole as a prodigy, which he interprets (*augurari*) as warning him to seek his own home in philosophy rather than poetry;²³³ Licentius even compares Providence's orchestrating the occasion for their discussion to the 'divination by Fate' through which the Chaldean books came to be written.²³⁴

The presence of divinatory practices in this opening scene has led some scholars to see the passage as mystical rather than rational, having more to do with inspiration than argument.²³⁵ Yet we should note what it is that Providence has to 'say.' In each case, the sum total of her contribution is to provide an occasion for Licentius to notice the (sensible) world around him and to recognize it as something to be made sense of. At no point is there any inkling of a Thomistic distinction between natural and supernatural knowledge;²³⁶ the passage serves merely to draw attention to the fact that sensible experience moves human beings to inquire. The point of all this is to show human beings getting puzzled, first about the world, and then about the fact that they find the world puzzling.²³⁷ In creating the occasion for such self-reflective puzzles, Providence

that Licentius hears most clearly, and this is enough to plant in his mind the idea that there is nothing "outside order" (*praeter ordinem*). This is a mishearing insofar as Augustine attempts to make an epistemological claim, while Licentius hears a metaphysical one instead.

232 *De ord.* 1.8. Cf. *De div.* 1.103 where Quintus gives the example of the Consul Lucius Paulus who was deliberating about waging war with King Perses. Paulus came home to find his daughter in tears; when asked what was wrong she responded 'Persa is dead.' While she was talking about her dog, Persa, her father took her utterance as an omen of the ultimate defeat of Perses, the King.

233 *De div.* 1.9. Cf. *De div.* 1.99 where Quintus Cicero recounts portents of the approaching Marsian war, the most dire of which (*tristissimum*) was that shields at Lanuvium were chewed by mice.

234 *De Ord.* 1.14. Cf. *De div.* 1.125, where Quintus presents Posidonius' theory of divination by Fate, in which diviners observe current causes and infer future events from them. Fate in this context, is defined as the *ordo seriesque causarum*. Variants of this phrase are found throughout *De ord.*, most obviously its title. In our current passage, Licentius is sympathetic to the idea of an efficient causal nexus in which leaves and mice bring about the composition of important books, even though he has reservations about human capacity to work out such connections ahead of time. Within Posidonius' own theory, such practices are most often possible only for gods or human beings in altered states (i.e. possessed by gods), and because of this, divination by Fate is a form of divination, i.e. divine-human communication, rather than merely science.

235 Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned;" Christian Schäfer, "*Aqua haeret*."

236 Such readings are given an extreme articulation in Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity," 212, who argues for the role of a "supernatural foundationalism."

237 See *De ord.* 1.8, cited above.

confers no new revelation, but merely draws attention to the gaps in individuals' knowledge of the world and of themselves. In this way, sensible experience sends Augustine's little *schola* along the initial steps of a Platonist curriculum.²³⁸

We have traced a progression from *C. Acad.* through *De ord.*, as what we might call 'the locus of teaching' has expanded from conspiracies within Plato's Academy to a full course of study in the liberal disciplines, to an abbreviated curriculum in one or two particular liberal disciplines, to a willingness to be drawn into inquiry by sensible experience generally. This has been a process of expansion, insofar as the group of potential students begins from basically no one, expands to the upper levels of society, and finally embraces the whole of humanity. But this progress across works does not indicate a change of heart: Augustine begins with the Academy as a means of articulating a method of teaching; with that articulation in hand, he proceeds to apply it first to the liberal disciplines and then to sensible experience itself. In this way, he explores the possibility of human experience, both within the schoolroom and without, as potential starting points for self-reflective inquiry.

These three *loci* of teaching (Platonist philosophy, the liberal disciplines and sensible experience) fit into various different hierarchies and progressions. In the normal course of late antique life, an education began at home, as children acquire the most basic rudiments of an education by simply living in the world. At the right age, fortunate individuals would move on to the study of grammar and the other liberal arts, while a very few would then go on to study at

238 *De ord.*'s presentation of Providence as a teacher is furthered through the fact that she and Augustine, the character, actually vie for control in this scene. Augustine strives for quiet reflection, Providence accosts him with irritating noises. Augustine reasserts his role as teacher; Providence twists his words into an omen. Yet in all this, Augustine and Providence are engaged in the same project, albeit on different timetables (see *De ord.* 1.10 where Augustine claims that Licentius has progressed more quickly than he ever dared hope). Of course it is fitting that a discussion *de ordine* be initiated *ab ordine*, yet by presenting himself as repeatedly thwarted by Providence's schemes, Augustine as author makes it clear whose curriculum is actually being followed.

one of the philosophical schools. Scholars such as Trelenberg tacitly assume that this progression is relevant for interpreting Augustine's suggestions about teaching. Yet we can find another kind of hierarchy, one more in keeping with Augustine's own projects, if we look at the contents of these *loci* in terms of Augustine's Platonist impasses. The structuring power of intelligible unity is ubiquitous, but not all experiences in a human life will move individuals to recognize this fact.²³⁹ Impasses designed by Platonist teachers to un-teach and conceal occupy the greatest level of *articulation* in this respect: their absurd conclusions present an apparent lack of unity, one which draws individuals to inquire, and which cannot be overcome until the student actively reflects on his own rationality and the relation to intelligible reality that this presupposes. The liberal disciplines sit one step removed from this: they present ample puzzles for students to work through, and thus ample opportunities for students to engage with intelligible reality, yet the liberal disciplines do not themselves call this aspect of human rationality into question. It is therefore possible for an individual to master all the liberal arts and be a materialist, lacking the kind of self-knowledge that Augustine's Platonists would have their students learn. Sensible experience sits one step further removed, inasmuch as its puzzles are weaker: everyday life presents us with questions, yet it rarely calls on us to work out definitions; and prompts to inquire into one's own nature are easily overpowered by concerns for food, shelter, reputation and the like.²⁴⁰ Yet, as *De ord.* is at pains to show, it is still *possible* for an individual to be moved to the right kind of inquiry by sensible experience itself. And this possibility is integral to explaining why the world is good for human beings.

The account of unity that closes *De ord.* offers an explanation, albeit a *probabile* one, of

239 We might think of “the summoners” (*ta parakalounta*) of *Republic* 523c, i.e. those perceptions which somehow invite rational reflection.

240 See *C. Acad.*'s second dedication for discussion of “clouds of domestic affairs” (*rerum domesticarum nubibus*, *C. Acad.* 2.2) and the “burdens of mortal concerns” (*oneribus mortuarum curarum*, *C. Acad.* 2.4).

how it is that Providence uses sensible experience to carry out her role as Platonist teacher. This account is not concerned with Providence's means of communication, the various divinatory practices that clutter up the work's *mis-en-scène*; rather, at the close of the work, Augustine seeks out the most basic mechanisms of mind and world that make human beings the sort of things that are capable of responding to such a teacher's prompts, however they might be delivered.²⁴¹ If we take a step back, we find that the same account explains why this same teaching method works when it is practiced by the Platonists themselves. In *C. Acad.*, we saw that Arcesilaus' Platonist impasse, which seemed to render cognition impossible, could be successfully resolved only when the student realized that both he and Arcesilaus use cognitive norms in the process of debating this impasse. *C. Acad.* ends as Augustine claims it is *probabile* that such cognitive norms originated in the intelligible world.²⁴² Here in *De ord.*, we are given the rest of the picture, as Augustine explains how it is that human beings have access to this world in the first place, viz. through the role of intelligible unity in human rationality. *De beata v.*'s account of the *admonitio ad ueritatem*, meanwhile, offered an explanation as to why the absurd conclusions of Arcesilaus' skeptical impasses bother us so much: it is not merely that human beings *can* use intelligible realities to work through puzzles, we are the sorts of things that are by nature impelled to do so, and as *De beata v.* explains, this nature is ultimately grounded on our connection to intelligible reality, which permeates our lives whether we acknowledge it or not.

241 In the end, Augustine is simply non-committal about the intermediary causes through which unity works. At *De ord.* 2.49 he toys with the idea of *Natura* as a rational agent analogous to human builders. This may be a nod towards the Platonist idea of a Soul of the World, although Augustine is notoriously vague on this question. See Robert O'Connell, *Early Theory of Man*, 122. In any event, it is the immediate relationship between the mind and this intelligible first cause that Augustine is ultimately after. I disagree in the strongest terms possible with Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*, 11, 393, who attributes to Augustine in *De ord.* the view that “eine...umfassende Bildung in den enzyklopädischen Wissenschaften” is necessary for overcoming the problem of evil and thus for attaining happiness.

242 See chapter 2.

In the end, these three dialogues present a single argument, which starts from the act of inquiry, fashions a method of inquiry, prepares individuals for inquiry, provides a moral psychological account of why any of this might work, and sets out instructions for future courses of inquiry. While *De mus.* clearly continues the project set out here, so does *Soliloquia* and Augustine's other three dialogues, i.e. *De magistro*, *De quantitate animae* and *De libero arbitrio*. We find the move from aporetic debates to *oratio perpetua* again and again employed, as Augustine engages the same method of un-learning and self-discovery to prepare his readers for an eventual *probabile* conclusion. In each case, the ultimate subject of inquiry is the human mind and its relation to the intelligible world (in the term's of *Sol.* 1.7 'God and the soul). What changes are the first-order questions through which Augustine approaches his ultimate subject.²⁴³ Augustine may have set aside his project to write on all seven liberal disciplines, yet this change in plans can be seen as significant only if one reads *De ord.*'s closing discussion in the most narrow way. The liberal disciplines form only one small part of a much broader project, and, as *De ord.* shows, they present useful yet unnecessary means to Augustine's ultimate end, which is nothing short of attaining happiness by perfecting the mind's relation to the intelligible world.

243 See chapter 5 for a defense of this view.

CHAPTER 5

The Cassiciacum Project

The Cassiciacum set

As texts, *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.* and *De ord.* have struck scholars as compilations of materials loosely related by theme. This impression, I suspect, sustained the century-old debate as to whether the works were at root transcripts of actual conversations or literary fictions.²⁴⁴ In service of this debate, scholars took up a project of rearranging the works' individual *libri* in an attempt to find the correct narrative order.²⁴⁵ This most commonly involves detaching *C. Acad.* 1 from *C. Acad.* 2-3 and then passing over this initial book as a mere protropetic or exercise which is not necessary for advancing the 'real argument' of *C. Acad.* 2-3.²⁴⁶ The fact that scholars can even entertain violating a text's unity in this way, shows how little the project advanced in these texts has been understood.

I have argued that the literary form of each work (aporetic debates followed by *oratio perpetua*) in each case serves the same philosophical method. By tracing how this method plays out in each case, we uncovered the tight unity of each individual text. Augustine's method moves through three distinct stages: aporetic debates over a first-order question expose problems in a student's beliefs, reflection on the act of debate produce second-order discoveries about the

244 See my Introduction for a review of this debate that began with Rudolf Hirzel in 1895.

245 It was assumed that the correct narrative order corresponded with the order in which the conversations recounted actually occurred. By recovering this historical order, defenders of the dialogues' historicity hoped to show that all available evidence could be collated in the end. Yet the project of reordering individual books has outlived its original context, see for instance Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned," who presents a reordering while explicitly rejecting the historicity thesis. I argue for leaving the individual works intact and reading them in the order that Augustine discusses them in *Retract.* 1.1-3. See below.

246 Matthias Smalbrugge puts this particularly clearly in "L'Argumentation Probabiliste." David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," contrasts the "lighthearted" *C. Acad.* 1 with the "serious" and "somber" discussion of *C. Acad.* 2. Therese Fuhrer, *Contra Academicos*, simply omits *C. Acad.* 1 from her commentary.

student's rational capacities, and a grand *probabile* conclusion is presented as explaining the results of these earlier stages but is not proven true by them. In the secret history of the Academy that closes *C. Acad.* 3, Augustine claims a Platonist pedigree for this method, and he explains that its dual goals of un-learning (through aporetic debate) and discovery (through reflection on the act of debate) serve to 'purify' the student in preparation for the Platonic *mysteria* (through the closing *probabile* conclusion).

Augustine's *probabile* conclusions, reflections on debate and *aporiai* arrived at through debate form a web of explanations and *explananda* which bind each work into a unified whole. In *C. Acad.*, the discovery that the Stoics use cognitive norms in their unsuccessful attempt to defend the possibility of empirical cognition is explained by the *probabile* conclusion that cognition must have some non-empirical source.²⁴⁷ *De beata v.*'s reflections show that individuals such as Monica who lack cognition of the whole of Truth, still grasp some truths and are *moved* by this cognition of part, be it with dread or glee, to seek cognition of the whole. Augustine's closing account responds to these discoveries by differentiating between the mind's fully conforming to Truth=Wisdom=Christ, which is sufficient for happiness, and the *admonitio ad ueritatem*, which is brought about by cognition of part of Truth and identified with the work of the Holy Spirit. In *De ord.*, the facts that human beings are able to inquire into the world's fundamental structure and that sensible experience moves them to do so are explained by an account, put forth by *doctissimi viri*, claiming that one and the same intelligible unity structures natural objects, is employed by human beings engaged in rational thought, and under the right circumstances can structure and thus perfect the human mind itself. These connections between

²⁴⁷ Or, more generally, that anyone engaged in rational thought makes use of norms which can be grasped, while it is impossible to give an empirical account of how anything can be grasped.

explananda and *probabile* explanations are what unifies each text at the most fundamental level.

Having articulated these connections within each dialogue, we may start to spell out how the three works fit together as a set. The kernel of truth behind Licentius' suggestion at *C. Acad.* 1.11, that we can be happy in the mere search for truth, is articulated and corrected by *De beata v.*'s account of the Holy Spirit as *admonitio*. This affective force, which arises from cognition of part of Truth, is, in turn, explained by *De ord.*'s account of intelligible Unity as a first cause, which exerts its structuring influence on the human mind. The function of the dialogues' being set in a particular place and the interaction between external narrative features and the works' philosophical debates is explained by *De ord.*'s presentation of Providence as a *C. Acad.*-style Platonist teacher, setting out puzzles through sensible experience. This characterization of Providence becomes a main *explanandum* for *De ord.*'s closing account. In this way the dialogues' settings are not mere window dressing, but an integral part of their philosophical project. It is for this reason that these three dialogues have external settings, while the rest of Augustine's dialogues do not.²⁴⁸

But if we step back from such details, we find that each work begins and ends with inquiry. At root, each work is concerned with finding how it is possible for human beings to make progress toward and eventually attain wisdom and thus happiness. Augustine's big idea is that we can start to answer these questions by thinking about the act of inquiry itself, its presuppositions, short-comings and effects. The dialogue genre provides a natural vehicle for such a project. And in Augustine's hand, we find the genre set to a use that cannot ultimately be reduced to some more-or-less democratic value set on the free exchange of competing ideas.²⁴⁹ In

248 Bernd Reiner Voss, *Der Dialog*, 197, divided Augustine's dialogues into two basic classes of "*szenische und nichtszzenische*." The present study offers an explanation as to why these initial three works differ from the rest in this regard.

249 See Simon Goldhill, *End of Dialogue*, who questions the standard assumption that dialogues necessarily

the Cassiciacum dialogues, the views of one debater do not win out in the end,²⁵⁰ nor is progress made through compromise. Rather, through the shift from first-order debate to second-order reflection on debate, the competing views expressed within each work's debates are localized, as the presuppositions of both sides are shown to be problematic and the opposition of competing views is overshadowed by their debates' role as an object for Augustine's subsequent reflections.

The first fruits of Augustine's project are a *probabile* account of human moral psychology, an analysis of the obstacles that would keep one from accepting this account, and a method for overcoming these obstacles. This account is a fusion of Platonist intellectualism and Christian dogma of the Trinity and Providence, as we've seen. While Augustine would later turn to drawing hard divisions between Catholic Christianity and Platonism, at Cassiciacum he provides only the broadest outline, which is carefully silent on divisive issues,²⁵¹ embracing both perspectives insofar as both are 'intellectualist.'²⁵²

What is perhaps more interesting, or at least unique, is Augustine's analysis of the obstacles to understanding intellectualist modes of thought and the method he develops to overcome them. In the secret history that closes *C. Acad.* 3, Augustine identifies the familiarity of bodies (*consuetudo corporum*) as the heart of the problem. The dedications of *C. Acad.* suggest that the person who places undue worth in material goods comes to think that everything is material; when such a person inquires after the truth, he either falls into superstition by falsely

function through such a free exchange.

250 More precisely, none of the views explicitly defended in debate ends up being endorsed without substantial modification. Trygetius' position in *C. Acad.* 1 that wisdom can be found, for instance, hardly captures the Platonist account of intelligible reality at the end of *C. Acad.* 3.

251 It is somewhat difficult to see how *De beata v.*'s account of the Trinity can be made to fit into Platonism. At the very least, it is clear that Augustine is not attempting merely to graft the Christian Trinity onto Plotinus' three gods. Plotinus' discussion of the different levels of providence provides a more likely model. See Lewis Ayres, "Giving Wings to Nicaea" for discussion.

252 By 'intellectualist' I mean merely the thesis that there exists an intelligible world, which is accessible through the rational mind but not the bodily senses.

thinking himself to have found the truth or comes to despair of ever finding it. The big project of *C. Acad.* is to reorient such a person²⁵³ and bring him to see the existence of intelligible reality as *probabile*. The next two works address the person who has undergone this basic reorientation but still thinks about intelligible reality using concepts drawn from everyday, empirical experience. *De beata v.* confronts those who conceive of the mind's 'having wisdom' or 'having God' in the same way that one 'has' material possessions. *De ord.* confronts conceptions of the world's basic structure which put material bodies, the human mind and God on par, e.g. as successive links within a causal chain. All such perspectives must be un-learned and replaced with new ones which may accommodate the works' self-reflective discoveries. Augustine undertakes this reorientation through his three-stage method, which is itself a unique fusion of Socratic elenctic, Platonist self-reflection,²⁵⁴ and the skeptical Academics' certainty criterion and use of *probabile* impressions.

Scholars have failed to appreciate, often even to notice, the positive role played by Academic practice in Augustine's method. Foley sees skepticism as an obstacle to faith, Cary and Topping as an obstacle to liberal study, and Trelenberg as an obstacle to laying out the first principles of a demonstrative science.²⁵⁵ Yet all agree that skepticism is an *obstacle*, one which must be overcome as quickly as possible. But the dedications of *C. Acad.* present skepticism (despair at ever finding the Truth) as a symptom of a deeper problem, materialism. Augustine overcomes this deeper problem by appropriating the practices of the Academic skeptics, using their certainty criterion to cut away empirical claims to cognition, leaving only those impressions

253 The most immediately obvious candidate for reorientation is the work's actual dedicatee, Romanianus, whom Augustine had previously converted to the materialist 'superstition' of the Manichees.

254 For discussion of such practices in the *Enneads*, see Sara Rappe, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*," in *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge, 1996): 250-274.

255 Michael Foley, *De ordine*; Phillip Cary, "What Licentius learned;" Ryan Topping, "Perils of Skepticism;" Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*.

that are arrived at through direct self-reflection, while he adopts their use of *probabile* impressions, as a way of presenting his own intellectualist ideas.

One may find here a simple progression from materialism to skepticism to (non-skeptical) intellectualism,²⁵⁶ yet Augustine's method, as it plays out in these dialogues, at the very least *suggests* a type of localized skepticism, which is something more than a halfway house. In each case, Augustine arrives at some second-order certainty through reflection on a first-order debate. But it is the *act* of debate rather than any positive *conclusion* arrived at through debate, that allows Augustine to move forward. Since these second-order certainties are what really matter when it comes to wisdom and happiness, it is in principle possible for Augustine to claim such second-order certainties while withholding assent entirely when it comes to the works' first-order questions about empirical knowledge, efficient causal chains, etc. Augustine, as author, seems to favor such a localized skeptical position at points.²⁵⁷

My reconstruction of Augustine's method gives a new way to trace the development of Augustine's interlocutors across the three dialogues, particularly his students Licentius and Trygetius. While there are elements of doctrine in each work, they are presented as merely *probabile*: the young men progress not insofar as they come to *know* the right principles, but insofar as they undergo a psychological transformation and come to perceive the world differently, so that intellectualist doctrines which would formerly have seemed mere nonsense

256 This would mirror at least some readings of Augustine's intellectual autobiography in *Conf.*

257 At *De ord.* 1.11 Licentius argues that it is intellectually defensible for an individual to hold that all things are contained *in ordine*, even if a number of causes are beyond that individual's ability to discover. This position is not rejected but set aside, as Augustine's questions make it clear that Licentius has an efficient causal order in mind; Augustine, the character, is ultimately interested in the intelligible order or 'unity,' which makes such efficient orders possible and is what ultimately matters for human happiness. With this exchange, we find expressions of localized skepticism, both in Licentius' explicit position and in Augustine, the character's, willingness to set questions of efficient order aside while addressing more elevated questions of intelligible order.

come to appear to them worthy of approval. Rather than the accumulation of knowledge, we find a series of little conversions, a succession of adumbrations, as Augustine's companions come to see more clearly features of the intelligible world and their relation to it. Just as importantly, we find Augustine's companions gaining facility in articulating puzzles and in reflecting on their own rational activities. The debate of *C. Acad.* 1 proceeds by mostly verbal dispute, as each youth challenges the other to define one term after another. By *De ord.*, these same young men are articulating substantial formulations of the problem of evil.²⁵⁸ Likewise, the crucial turn from first-order inquiry to second-order reflection on inquiry comes only well into the closing *oratio perpetua* of *C. Acad.*, as Augustine points out that the skeptic himself uses cognitive norms to argue that cognition is impossible. The self-reflective discovery that we are moved by inquiry to desire truth, while not fully explicit in *De beata v.*'s debate, still manages to influence which positions debaters take as serious options.²⁵⁹ *De ord.*, by contrast, *begins* as Licentius reflects on how Providence brought about their discussion of providence.

Given this model of progress, Licentius' refusal in *De beata v.* to accept the conclusion to an argument whose premises he accepts as true, does not mark a setback but progress. Alypius had chastised the young man at *C. Acad.* 2.28 for being swept away by one little argument (*una interrogatiuncula*) and for thus assenting to impressions that are less than certain. This is problematic from the standpoint of the works' big project, since it exposes Licentius to the trap of empiricist superstition.²⁶⁰ By *De beata v.*, the young man has taken Alypius' criticism to heart, and even invokes his chastiser's phraseology as he refuses to be swept away by argument once

258 See *De ord.* 1.19 where Trygetius formulates a version of the problem which turns on an ambiguity in how the term *distributio* is understood. In so doing, Trygetius joins Augustine in drawing out the implications of the initial puzzle set out by Providence.

259 See my discussion of *De beata v.*'s Orata passage.

260 Licentius in fact falls into this trap as he claimed to know (*scio*) that a tree cannot suddenly become silver. *C. Acad.* 2.27.

again.²⁶¹ Among other things, this cross-reference puts to rest the still lingering attempt to rearrange the dialogues' individual *libri*, insofar as it places *De beata v.* and by extension *De ord.* after *C. Acad.* 2, and thus too late to be placed in the seven-day gap *a disputando* between *C. Acad.* 1 and *C. Acad.* 2.²⁶² By uncovering the method at play in these works, and the positive role of Academic skepticism within them, we can rescue the unity of these individual texts from scholars who would separate and rearrange their constituent *libri*.

Propaedeutic Philosophy

I have argued that the Cassiciacum works, at the most basic level, fulfill a propaedeutic function: it is worth asking what exactly that means. In particular, it is unclear whether the project undertaken in these works is meant to be preparation for philosophical undertakings or part of philosophy itself. The issue hinges on how we understand two central dichotomies: *C. Acad.*'s contrast of reason and authority²⁶³ and *De ord.*'s claim that all philosophy is a *duplex quaestio* into God and the soul.²⁶⁴ What's more, the Cassiciacum works combine the commonplace notion that liberal study is preparation for philosophy with a notion of philosophy as itself preparation for the direct vision of God. All such undertakings, whether pre-philosophical or philosophical, end up being preparation for something. Yet if we simply line them up, it is not clear that we are left with a clearly delineated activity, 'philosophy,' occupying a middle stage

261 At *C. Acad.* 2.28 Alypius criticizes Licentius for being moved by boyish or puerile levity (*utrum iuuenali an puerili leuitate commotus*). At *De beata v.* 15 Licentius calls Augustine's argument a little trifle for boys (*paruae puerorum illecebrae*) and claims that Alypius, who is not present, would never give in to it. This phrase also combines the diminutive notion of Alypius' *interrogatiuncula*.

262 By the rules of the game, as they have developed, cross-references secure only that *De ord.* 2 comes after *De beata v.*, so technically it would be possible to argue for the order *C. Acad.* 1-3, *De ord.* 1, *De beata v.*, *De ord.* 2. This would still permit the order that Van Haeringen gave for the conversations occurring at Cassiciacum (as opposed to the order in which the texts were composed). Johann Hendrik Van Haeringen, *De Augustini ante baptismum rusticantis operibus*. Yet his goal was to defend the historicity of the dialogues; it is not clear what literary or philosophical purpose would be served by establishing this particular order. For fuller discussion, see my "The Problem of Order in Augustine's Cassiciacum Dialogues" *Augustinian Studies* (under review).

263 *C. Acad.* 3.42-43.

264 *De ord.* 2.47

between propaedeutic and the vision of God.

The uniqueness of Augustine's project is obscured by the traditional terms in which he presents it. We must not assume that such terms and dichotomies bear fixed meanings across the centuries, both those leading up to and those following upon Augustine's own work. In what follows, I will spell out the ways in which Augustine's conception of philosophy differs from those models with which his work seems naturally associated. After having spelled out what Augustine's conception of philosophy is not, I will attempt to say what conception of philosophy actually is at play in these early dialogues. The picture that emerges is of different *orders* of inquiry, which may proceed simultaneously as initial questions are approached in increasingly self-reflective ways.

At *C. Acad.* 3.43, Augustine claims that he and his companions are sped along by “the dual weight of authority and reason” (*gemino pondere...auctoritatis atque rationis*). He proceeds, famously, to associate these two weights with Christ and the Platonists, and he claims that these are not in conflict. Various scholars take Augustine to be distinguishing between two sources of true propositions,²⁶⁵ something like Aquinas' distinction between natural and supernatural or revealed knowledge.²⁶⁶ Yet we saw this distinction blurred in *De beata v.*, which brought human rationality and Monica's prophetic utterances together under a single account, by positing a relation to Christ as the sole source for every truth ever grasped by any human being.

The deeper problem with this 'Thomistic' reading of Augustine is that it attributes to Augustine a project that is ultimately Euclidean or Cartesian in its goals and epistemic framework. The model of a demonstrative science provides a familiar framework in which first

265 See especially Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse*; Michael Foley, *De ordine*.

266 Brian Harding, “Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity,” coins the term “supernatural foundationalism.”

principles, arrived at non-deductively, provide the basis from which other propositions may be derived.²⁶⁷ Augustine's *vera*, which are discovered through direct self-reflection, seem a plausible candidate for such first principles. Yet such a strategy fails to secure a robust enough basis for a science: Augustine's self-reflective *vera* are cognitive but trivial,²⁶⁸ while his *probabile* conclusions are robustly explanatory but uncertain.²⁶⁹ Such outcomes would pose a problem for Augustine if he were in fact attempting to build a demonstrative science upon certainties acquired through self-reflection. Descartes, who is heavily indebted to Augustine for the *cogito* argument as a means of overcoming skepticism, of course made such an attempt. He ran into notorious difficulties.²⁷⁰ The parallels between these two thinkers have led scholars to see Augustine as a limping Cartesian, who gave up before bringing his demonstrative science to fruition.²⁷¹ Against this, we might more accurately think of Descartes as an Augustinian who extended arguments and methods beyond their breaking point. Questions of name-calling aside, we find no talk of demonstrative sciences in Augustine's dialogues or even plans for them.²⁷²

The goal pursued in Augustine's dialogues is happiness through knowledge of the Truth which is God. This Truth is no mere set of propositions. Truth is an active structuring cause: to know it, is to have one's mind structured by it. This relationship is spoken of in terms of the mind's conforming to its proper measure (*De beata v.*), of its being unified by Unity (*De ord.*), and in the somewhat later *De quantitate animae*, as the vision of God. What is needed for this is

267 Such a framework is famously if problematically presented in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.

268 Among these truths were *C. Acad.*'s "Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression is true or false," *De beata v.*'s "human beings want to find the truth," *De ord.*'s "human beings can be moved to inquiry through sensory experience."

269 See *C. Acad.*'s account of intelligible reality, *De beata v.*'s account of the Trinity's role in human moral psychology, *De ord.*'s account of the structuring power of intelligible unity.

270 See Lex Newman, "Descartes' Epistemology," for a review of the 'Cartesian Circle.'

271 See Christopher Kirwan, "Against the Skeptics." By contrast Emmanuel Bermon, "Augustin et les *Academica*" and Jörg Trelenberg, *De ordine*, see Augustine as successfully laying such a foundation in these works.

272 Augustine's plan to write a series of works on the liberal arts could be taken as evidence to the contrary. See below for discussion.

not first principles but psychological transformation, through which the 'eyes of the mind' may be made fit to behold such a sight. In the Cassiciacum works, such 'purification,' as *C. Acad.* puts it, is pursued through a course of un-learning and self-discovery, as Augustine rewrites his students' body of assents, thus changing how they perceive the world. While these works cannot bring an individual all the way to the vision of God, they bring him closer, by bringing the way he forms impressions of himself and the world into alignment with his own limits and capacities, as discovered through this process of un-learning and self-discovery. It is in this sense, as *De ord.* 2.47 puts it, that self-knowledge is a necessary step to knowledge of God.²⁷³

I suggest that an authority, within this scheme, is simply whatever can help an individual accomplish this psychological transformation. The main obstacle to this, as *C. Acad.* made clear, is the familiarity of bodies (*consuetudo corporum*) and the modes of thought that it instills. The Incarnate Christ helps us overcome these by primarily moral means, showing through words and deeds that we should not value material things.²⁷⁴ Platonists do this by using puzzles to un-teach and conceal.²⁷⁵ And it is insofar as such processes can be occasioned by sensible experience (*De ord.*) or by skeptical arguments against the possibility of cognition (*C. Acad.*) that Providence and the Academic skeptics can be numbered among the Platonist teachers. But in either case it is the nature of the mind and its relation to the intelligible world, rather than any special claims to the Truth within Platonism or Christianity, that make such progress a possibility.²⁷⁶

It is a further question how this relation of faith to authority plays out in the Cassiciacum dialogues' conception of philosophy. After a long discussion of study in the liberal arts, *De ord.*

273 See discussion below.

274 *C. Acad.* 3.42.

275 *C. Acad.* 3.38.

276 See below for discussion of whether or not Augustine takes these Platonist methods to be sufficient for attaining wisdom.

2.47 presents a series of abridged versions for those who lack time; the last of these calls us to know unity as it structures the everyday things which we constantly sense and do. Augustine proceeds to claim that we find a loftier study of unity in the *disciplina* of philosophy, and that in fact all of philosophy is taken up with the *duplex quaestio*²⁷⁷ into the soul and God. By the first we know ourselves, we are made worthy of happiness, and we can be said to be learning (*docentibus*); by the second, we know our origin, which makes us happy, and we can be said to be learned (*doctis*).

We might think these distinctions suggest three progressive stages: the student prepares for philosophy through the liberal arts or by noticing the power of unity in world around him; by philosophy he acquires self-knowledge, and this in turn prepares him for inquiry into God. Such a reading prefigures the later medieval curriculum that led from liberal arts to philosophy to theology. Yet this reading sits ill with both the immediate and the broader contexts of *De ord.* 2.47. First of all, it is not clear what people who are already *docti* would gain by inquiry into God. Second, it isn't clear how striving to know how unity structures our thoughts isn't *already* inquiry into the soul (and even into God for that matter). If we step back, we find that the practice of noticing the power of unity in what we sense and think is not limited to Augustine's abridged alternative to liberal study, but is in fact the whole point of engaging in liberal study in the first place.²⁷⁸ If Augustine's dichotomies outline three progressive stages, the lines between these stages are quite difficult to draw. Nor can these three different undertakings be distinguished by their objects, since it possible to engage in a discipline such as astronomy either as a means to answering first-order questions about stars and planets or as a means to second-

²⁷⁷ I take this to mean 'philosophical investigation' and thus something closer to a 'quest' than a 'question.'

²⁷⁸ At least as far as *De ord.*'s central project is concerned. Augustine acknowledges the practical uses of the liberal arts at *De ord.* 2.39-46. But he does this only to set them aside as beyond his current concerns.

order discovery of one's own rational ability to think about such matters.

De ord. 2.47's dichotomies outline the different ways in which one may approach *any* object of inquiry; they differ one from the other, not in the object they take but in their respective *orders* of self-reflection. This is clearest when one begins with the first-order content of the liberal disciplines: by thinking about these, one creates an opportunity to turn and think about his act of thinking, thus engaging in second-order 'philosophical' inquiry into the soul and its capacities; and by then reflecting on the ultimate explanation for these capacities, one engages a third-order inquiry into the soul's cause, God. While second-order inquiries will always produce conclusions about the soul, and third-order inquiries will always produce conclusions about God, all that is needed for Augustine's initial first-order inquiry is that we think about *something*. Literally anything will do.

In practice, Augustine seems fond of beginning with first-order questions about the soul itself. This produces the dialectical structures of *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, in which debates into the soul's capacities for cognition and happiness arrive at answers, not through the conclusions of these debates, but by providing an instance of rational activity to serve as the object of subsequent second-order reflections. This coincidence of first- and second-order questions is by no means necessary, from the standpoint of method at least, and Augustine's aborted project of writing on the liberal arts suggests a different structure, in which first-order questions about the contents of each liberal art are eventually left behind, as the line of inquiry moves on to different second-order questions about how debaters could undertake such inquiries in the first place.²⁷⁹ This is borne out in the one extant work from this proposed set, *De mus.*, which spends five

²⁷⁹ As Augustine puts it in *Retr.* 1.6, these in these works, he wanted “by means of certain steps to arrive at incorporeal things through corporeal things” (*per corporalia ad incorporealia quibusdam quasi passibus peruenire*).

books discussing poetic meter and ends with a consideration of the soul's relation to intelligible reality. Such conclusions, while perhaps necessary for understanding the deep structure of the world and the first causes of what make poetic meter possible, are hardly useful, much less necessary, for answering practical questions about the resolution of dactyls into spondees.

Augustine's method creates problems when it comes to questions of what a work is ultimately *about*, how we should characterize the fundamental project it pursues. Such questions are not terribly apparent for *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, given their coincidence of first- and second-order questions.²⁸⁰ But should we say that the *De mus.* is ultimately an inquiry into poetic meter or an inquiry into the soul and its relation to intelligible reality? Augustine's titles seem to follow first-order questions. But this does not settle matters, for as we've seen, Augustine does not go about studying music in the same way as people interested in poetic meter in itself. Characterizing the ultimate goal of *De ord.* is somewhat more complicated. Unlike *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, its initial first-order questions about providence have no immediately obvious relation to the soul's capacities, and as a result *De ord.*'s second-order conclusions about the soul do not seem to answer the work's initial set of questions. Yet in *De ord.*, more than *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.* or *De mus.*, we find Augustine's course of self-reflective inquiry *reformulating* initial first-order questions: *De ord.*'s big idea is that questions about providence, at some level, *are* questions about the soul, its capacities, and its relation to intelligible reality. In *De ord.*, we thus find the same coincidence of first- and second-order questions, but only after doing enough work to get the first-order questions right.

280 *Retract.* 1.1.1 gives both *Contra Academicos* and *De Academicis* as possible titles of this first work. It is perhaps possible that these two titles describe the work's first- and second-order subjects, respective: i.e. a refutation of the Academics insofar as they are skeptical and a study of the Academics, insofar as Augustine's 'Platonist' methodology can be stitched together from and attributed to the practices of the Old and New Academies, when they are treated as pursuing a single project.

What then should we say about the Cassiciacum dialogues' status as philosophy or preparation for philosophy? If we judge by first-order questions as they are initially formulated, we find a neat progression from *De ord.*, which inquires into the sensible world, to *Sol.*, which explicitly takes up questions about God and the soul. Yet we cannot extend this trajectory backward, since *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, in taking up questions of the soul's capacities for cognition and happiness, are *already* engaged in philosophical inquiry, and thus *De ord.*'s discussion of the sensible world would constitute a setback. But if we approach these works via their second-order conclusions, we find the neat progression, which I have already laid out, in which Augustine's *probabilia* conclusions establish that the soul is related to the intelligible world (*C. Acad.*), argue that this relation makes happiness possible (*De beata v.*), and spell out how one may go about achieving such a relation (*De ord.*).²⁸¹ Judging by second-order conclusions, Augustine has been investigating God and the soul from the beginning, although perhaps not under these descriptions. All of the Cassiciacum works are thus part of and not merely preparation for philosophy.

While Augustine employs the traditional distinction between preparation and philosophy, he breaths new life into it, as he makes this distinction play a very particular role in his own project. I have argued that this role amounts to a division between first-order inquiry into some subject and second-order inquiry into the soul's capacities, which is carried out through reflection on the act of inquiry with which one began. Given the intensely self-reflective nature of this method, attempts at dividing one bit of text from another quickly fall apart. And while there may be a moment in each work where this self-reflective move is first decisively made, the reader

281 Characterizing the second-order conclusions of *Sol.* is difficult for the simple reason that the work was never finished. See discussion below.

who realizes this and then revisits what came before will find hints and intimations from the start.²⁸² In the end, the distinction between preparation and philosophy is not a matter of distinguishing between the right bits of text, the right objects of discussion, or even the right passages of inquiry: the distinction sits in the way the individual thinks about these things. Literally anything serves as a fitting starting-point for an inquiry into the soul and God, and throughout the dialogues' debates we find one character appreciating the second-order ramifications of a discussion (usually Augustine) and another character not. If we must identify a threshold between preparation and philosophy, it is the point when an individual begins to notice his own rational activities, the point at which his inquiries, whatever subject they may have initially taken up, begin to be self-reflective.

For the person who has crossed this threshold and become self-reflective, it is not clear what 'philosophical' activity there is for him to engage in, other than to become *more* self-reflective. The process of un-learning and discovery can be fruitfully repeated, as we've seen in the move from *C. Acad.* to *De beata v.* to *De ord.* As one progresses, his mind discovers more and more sophisticated capacities, while at the same time confronting its own limitations in more profound ways. Through both processes, but particularly the latter, the mind comes to recognize its own contingent nature and its dependence on God. If the Cassiciacum works are to be labeled 'propaedeutic' in their attempt to change our perceptions through un-learning and self-discovery, then all philosophy is for Augustine propaedeutic. In the spirit of Platonism, the point of philosophical endeavor is not to impart anything that is ultimately new, but to bring to fruition that which is in some sense already within our reach.²⁸³

282 *De beata v.* 6-9's opening banter about Trygetius' weight, for instance, sets out the conceptions of measure which will figure in the work's concluding account of the Trinity.

283 Here I invoke only the 'spirit' of Platonism – in *De mag.* Augustine explicitly rejects Plato's theory of recollection (or at least an interpretation of it that requires past lives of the soul) in exchange for his illumination

Models of development

As Augustine's first extant works, the Cassiciacum dialogues provide key evidence for narratives of his development and debates over the continuity or discontinuity of his thought. Dichotomies abound here too, and various scholars have seen these early works as “Classical” rather than Christian, as elitist rather than egalitarian, as optimistic about Platonism and the liberal arts rather than acknowledging the need for faith and fallen humanity's dependence on grace.²⁸⁴ Many of these dichotomies have been taken from Augustine's own later works.²⁸⁵ Yet, once again, we must use caution in determining the exact role dichotomies are meant to play in these contexts.

Augustine is often quite willing to use his philosophical predecessors to think with. The extreme case of this comes in *C. Acad.*, where the Academic skeptics are made to play the role of Platonist teachers. Yet if we look closer, we find that the Platonists themselves are made to play roles that have no clear antecedent in actual Platonist practice, while in *De ord.* even Providence is accepted into their number. In each case, Augustine re-imagines the possibilities of philosophical history without being bound by allegiance to any particular school. Likewise for liberal study, which he invokes as a useful means of beginning a course of self-reflective inquiry. But from the bare fact that Augustine talks about liberal study and various philosophical schools, it does not follow that he takes liberal and philosophical study to be *necessary* for attaining

theory, by which we come to know intelligibles by presently seeing them in the light of truth, i.e. Christ the inner teacher (*De mag.* 38-45). See Gareth Matthews, “Knowledge and illumination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, (Cambridge, 2001): 171-185. The idea that the whole of philosophy is ultimately some kind of purification or attempt to recover what has been somehow lost is bigger than merely Platonism. See George Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford, 2001).

284 For the most recent contributions to the debate over whether and to what extent Augustine's conversion was the Platonism or Catholic Christianity, see Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*; Brian Dobell, *Intellectual Conversion*.

285 Freedom vs. grace (*Ad Simplicianum*); pride vs. humility (*Conf.*). See discussion below.

happiness. Liberal study and school philosophy provide a particularly clear place from which to begin the course of self-reflective study that will lead one to happiness, yet as Augustine goes to lengths to show us in *De ord.*, plumbing problems will also do. It becomes increasingly difficult to defend claims of Augustine's youthful elitism, if we take *De ord.*'s initial portrayal of Providence seriously.

It is a further question whether or not Augustine takes the classical curriculum of liberal and philosophical study to be *sufficient* for attaining happiness. Given Augustine's intellectualist commitments, this amounts to the question of whether he thought one could attain happiness through Platonism alone. In *Conf.* 7.26-27, he clearly did not: the Platonists saw the destination as from a mountain top, but pride prevented them from accepting the way (i.e. Christ) by which they might arrive at this destination. This passage, and ones like it, have made the question of Platonism's sufficiency salient for readers of the Cassiciacum works. The need for Christ as a mediator, for humility and for the right kind of grace have been treated as the key issues for adjudicating this question. In this regard, scholars have simply followed the lead of Augustine's later works, where he takes pains to distinguish between Platonism and Christianity.²⁸⁶

If we turn to the Cassiciacum works themselves, we find a quite consistent silence on all of these issues. *C. Acad.* endorses Platonist practice and doctrine in the end, but only insofar as its intellectualism overlaps with what Augustine takes Catholic Christianity to teach. What's more, it is not clear that any actual Platonists ever engaged in the exact set of practices attributed to them in *C. Acad.* or even that Augustine himself thought they had. *De beata v.* makes Christ, under the guise of *modus animi*, mediator between the human mind and the ultimate basis of reality, viz. God the Father, the *summus modus*; but this is a naturalizing account, and it does not

²⁸⁶ See especially *Conf.* 7.13-27.

invoke the role of the incarnate Christ as a special kind of Mediator between the Father and Christians in particular. This same account makes all human cognition a gift of grace, but again as a matter of nature; *De beata v.* does not enter the topic of special grace which figures so prominently in the later *Ad Simplicianum*. Augustine's most novel endorsement of Platonism comes in *De ord.*, where he presents Providence as a Platonist teacher, but the thought here is that the Platonists have worked out a method which imitates that of Providence not *vice versa*. And since *De ord.* is concerned with only the broad outlines of this method, it is not clear whether the Platonists have got *enough* of it right to bring a student all the way to wisdom and happiness.

In general, the dialogues look for the basic conditions which make human happiness possible. As a result, Augustine is content to draw connections between Platonism and Christianity where they are to be drawn, and at least for the moment he does not attempt to drive wedges between them. The fact that the dialogues so *thoroughly* avoid those issues which later works would make salient at least suggests that Augustine is aware of these issues at Cassiciacum. But whether or not this is the case, and why he might have wanted to avoid these issues must remain matters of speculation and argument *e silentio*.

How then should we think about the progress across the works of Augustine's early career? I suggest that the model I used to trace developments across the Cassiciacum dialogues may be useful for thinking about progress between all of Augustine's dialogues as well as *Conf.* From the standpoint of doctrinal commitment, the dialogues are significantly open, both insofar as their big conclusions are put forth as *probabile* rather than certain, and in that they seek out only the most basic conditions of human moral psychology. Progress is made as one adumbration

is filled in with another, and the point of the whole undertaking is for the reader to see these adumbrations as *probabile*, once he has reflected on his own capacities and limitations.

Given such a project, a degree of revision is to be expected and need not mark a rupture in Augustine's thought. As for the issues of grace, humility and Christ as Mediator, ruptures can be found only if one reads the early works' silence on these issues as indicating that Augustine had found no place for them in his account of happiness. But given the nature of Augustine's project, all we can infer from such silence is simply that these works do not take a stand on these issues.²⁸⁷ At the same time, we cannot infer from this lack of fast ruptures that Augustine had planned out the complete progression of his next several years' work from the start. Given that the ultimate conclusions of all these works, from *Cassiciacum* on, fit together into an intellectualist moral psychology, more-or-less at home in versions of both Platonism and Catholic Christianity, it seems likely that Augustine had *some* sense of where he was headed when he started out. But in the end, his particular mode of philosophical inquiry raises serious problems for unitarians and developmentalists alike. Each work commits to only as much doctrine as Augustine looks to make *probabile* at that moment, leaving open multiple possibilities, to which Augustine may later freely turn.

It is perhaps the price of Augustine's eventual success that a great mass of scholarship has attempted to understand these works as a means to reconstructing what Augustine thought and not the other way around. To my way of thinking, the more interesting task is the one we have

287 If self-reflection is meant to be a means of discovering human nature, it is an open question whether or not this could be a means of discovering the current fallen state of that nature. At *Cassiciacum*, and particularly in *Sol.*, we find Augustine reflecting on his own short-comings and praying for God's aid to overcome them. Yet in the end, such problems are analyzed in terms of materialistic thought, which even Augustine had not completely rooted out. In *Conf.*, we find something stronger in Augustine's disgust at his inability to will as he wants. This seems a more likely place to find Augustine identifying our fallen condition through means of *Cassiciacum*-style self-reflection; yet it is a further question whether or not the Augustine of *Conf.* would use terms of *probabilia* for the claim that human nature was damaged in Adam.

some plausible chance of accomplishing, i.e. understanding how these texts work, individually and as a set, their methods, goals, and peculiar means of argument. Hypotheses about what Augustine, as a historical individual, may have thought can be a useful heuristic for approaching these texts, and a helpful safeguard against importing anachronistic modes of thought, but as for what may or may not have passed through the man's mind, I will not attempt to say.

The later dialogues and *Confessions*

Augustine's later dialogues, *De quant. an.* [composed in 388], *De lib. arbit.* [388/391] and *De mag.* [389] all follow the same basic form of aporetic debate followed by an *oratio perpetua*. *Sol.* [386] would presumably also follow this form, had the sketch for its final book, *De imm. an.* [387], ever been completed.²⁸⁸ I would argue that this continuity of form stems from a continuity in philosophical project, that each of these works employs *C. Acad.*'s 'Platonist' method of un-learning and self-discovery as preparation for a *probabile* conclusion. In each case, the act of inquiry is vital, as it provides an object for our study of ourselves. Even *Conf.* [397-401], while not obviously a dialogue,²⁸⁹ follows an analogous form, as nine books of autobiographical narrative give way to concluding reflections on the nature of memory and time. I will end by suggesting in broad terms how my analysis of the project set out in *Cassiciacum*, its goals, methods and literary innovations may provide new insight into these later works. I will limit my discussion to three examples. *De quant. an.* provides a particularly clear example of the 'Cassiciacum method.' This same method provides us a new angle on the question of how *Sol.* and *De imm. an.* might have been joined in a single work. I close by suggesting how this same

²⁸⁸ While *De mus.* lacks this formal shift, we find an analogous shift in the subject and mode of inquiry starting with the sixth book. See chapter 4 for discussion.

²⁸⁹ It has been suggested that *Conf.* may be read as a somewhat one-sided conversation between Augustine and God. See below.

method, with some adaptations, provides the big structure of *Conf.*²⁹⁰

De quant. an. is one of Augustine's most undeservedly neglected works. To a casual reader, the work addresses the scholastic question, "How big is the soul?" Its debate reaches no conclusion, and the work ends with a bluntly dogmatic exposition of the grades of virtue. But on closer inspection, *De quant. an.* presents a distillation of the Cassiciacum method. As in *C. Acad.* and *De beata v.*, we find a coincidence of first-order questions and second-order conclusions, as *De quant. an.* begins and ends with considerations of the soul. One of the main accomplishments of *De quant. an.* is the re-formulation of the initial question posed. In *De ord.*, we saw an initial question about providence transformed into a question about the soul's relation to the intelligible world. In *De quant. an.* the notion of *quantitas animae* is 'dematerialized,' as a question about the soul's spatial extension (*magnitudo*) gives way to questions about its power (*vis*). Augustine answers this new question in his *oratio perpetua*,²⁹¹ where he sets out an account of the soul's seven powers and seven respective grades of virtue: (1) vegetative, (2) sensory, (3) rational, (4) being purified, (5) having been purified, (6) desire to understand Truth, (7) vision of Truth. The role of purification as both an intellectual and religious process is stressed,²⁹² thus elaborating *C. Acad.*'s suggestion that either Christ or the Platonists can lead the soul to the intelligible world. The list itself, taken in its entirety, presents an elaboration of *De ord.*'s course of study, as the soul strives to know God through reflection on it itself and its cause.²⁹³

290 See Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, for an excellent reading of *De lib. arbit.*, which is roughly in line with my discussion, albeit expressed in different terms. Cloeren presents *De mag.* as a 'transcendental investigation' into the conditions of knowledge, likening it to Plato's *Meno*. Herman J. Cloeren, "St. Augustine's *De Magistro*, a Transcendental Investigation," *Augustinian Studies* 16 (1985): 21-27. I suggest that such an investigation is an application of the Cassiciacum method applied to the question of how learning is possible: the work's heavily aporetic debates 'un-teach' the thought that one may learn through signs, yet reflection on the act of debate shows that learning does in fact happen. In this way, we are prepared for the final *probabile* account of Christ the Inner Teacher, who teaches by showing us things themselves, e.g. Justice.

291 *De quant. an.* 70-81.

292 *De quant. an.* 78.

293 *De ord.*'s two levels of reflection generate a hierarchy of first-, second- and third-order inquiry, as the soul

The transition to *oratio perpetua* is noted at *De quant. an.* 69, from which point Augustine proceeds by presenting himself not as a most learned (*doctissimus*), most wise and perfect man but as someone without instruction (*indoctus*),²⁹⁴ who can nevertheless be certain in his own experience of what he is capable of (*quid ipse ualeam, securus experior*).²⁹⁵ Reflection on one's own rational activities could not be more clearly pointed out. What's more, Augustine's disavowal of wisdom suggests that he is not certain (*securus*) about *everything* he is about to say. By his own account it is not possible for someone not yet perfect to discover *through self-reflection* the account of the soul's perfection that Augustine proceeds to give. Augustine is quite aware of this. But rather than take his disavowal to be insincere or his account of the soul to be unsupported by the terms he has set, we may find in *De quant. an.* a process of un-learning and self-reflection which prepares Augustine's interlocutor and readers to see *De quant. an.*'s concluding account as *probabile*.

The cumulative effect of these parallels between Cassiciacum and *De quant. an.* is to provide a new model for approaching this later work, one which brings new questions and concerns. How exactly does *De quant. an.*'s debate bring one to see its ultimate conclusion as *probabile*? It is fairly obvious that *De quant. an.* seeks to 'un-teach' notions of the soul as spatially extended, yet can we say more than this about the elenctic function of *De quant. an.*'s debate?²⁹⁶ Alternatively, what are the self-reflective *vera* that provide the jumping off point for

inquirers, respectively into anything whatever (in *De ord.*, the order of the physical world), the soul itself and the soul's cause (God). This basic scheme is elaborated at *De quant. an.* 79, where Augustine renaming his seven levels as the soul's actions (1) *de corpore*, (2) *per corpus*, (3) *circa corpus*, (4) *ad seipsam*, (5) *in seipsa*, (6) *ad Deum*, (7) *apud Deum*.

294 Could this mean not merely someone lacking instruction, but someone who has been actively un-taught after the manner of a Platonist students? Cf. *C. Acad.* 3.38.

295 *De quant. an.* 70.

296 For instance, we might take *De quant. an.* to address the deeper notion that a thing needs to be in a place in order to effect changes in that place.

this final conclusion, and what aspects of *De quant. an.*'s debate do they reflect on? As we have seen, it is often not a debate's conclusions that ultimately advance the project of a work, but the fact that we can enter into debates in the first place (*C. Acad.*) or the effect that doing so has on debaters (*De beata v.*).²⁹⁷

A similar set of concerns can be used to approach the question of how *De imm. an.* might have completed the project begun in *Sol.* At *Retract.* 1.4-5, Augustine tells us that *Sol.* was written slightly later than *C. Acad.*, *De beata v.* and *De ord.*, while Augustine was still in Cassiciacum, and that *De imm. an.* was written in the same year as *De quant. an.*, even if it never reached its intended form as *Sol.* 3. A simple list of arguments makes up *De imm. an.*, and no sense is given as to who says what. While six of Augustine's seven complete dialogues ends in *oratio perpetua*, none of these concluding sections takes up an entire book. At the same time, Augustine's three stages of aporetic debate, reflection on the act of inquiry and final leap to a *probabile* conclusion often do not coincide perfectly with the formal division between debate and *oratio*. While it would be presumptuous for us to guess who would have said what in *Sol.* 3, or even where to place the transition from debate to *oratio*, it is likely that neither of these issues matters much to the work's overall argument, if Augustine's earlier and later dialogues in fact provide fitting *comparanda*. What such comparisons provide is a way of thinking about the progression between arguments, beyond simply plugging the conclusions of one into the

297 The place to start, I suggest, is *De quant. an.* 46, where Augustine, in the course of criticizing a definition of perception, reflects on the growth of a human body (e.g. his own). Within the debate's immediate context, these observations are made to do merely negative work, yet if we look back from the *oratio perpetua*'s catalogue of the soul's powers, we find here an example of the soul's actively exercising its sensory capacity, taking its own vegetative activity as its object. This short display of the soul's activities, within the *De quant. an.*'s overall context, becomes an *explanandum* which is eventually answered by Augustine's concluding account of the soul's grades of power. The process continues at *De quant. an.* 49ff, where discussion of beasts and knowledge (*scientia*) serve to distinguish between the soul's rational capacity and the lower (sensory) and higher (intellectual) capacities that it uses this rational capacity to think about.

premises of another: taken together, the three books of *Sol./De imm. an.* provide many failed attempts to answer some question which may at once advance a project of un-learning while also providing instances of increasingly sophisticated rational actions to serve as the object of later reflections.

In the end, my study's biggest contribution to the reading of these works is perhaps the simple observation that Augustine's reason for asking a given question is not necessarily that he wants that particular question answered. The real key to fitting the parts of *Sol./De imm. an.* together may ultimately come in abandoning the idea that the soul's immortality is the ultimate concern addressed in this work. Inquiries into God and the soul show the soul engaging more sophisticated capacities than we have seen up to this point. The soul's ability to think about such matters and its ultimate failure to reach its goal provide a fitting next starting point for seeing the soul's connection to and difference from the eternity of God and the intelligible world. When we look for the big goal of *Sol./De imm. an.*, we should ask what Augustine *makes* of these self-reflective observations, what *probabile* conclusion about the soul's nature and its relation to God they prepare us to accept. And it is only with this in hand that we can return to the task of tracing the winding lines of argument that are meant to prepare us for this conclusion.

The present study may contribute to our understanding of *Conf.* in two fundamental ways. First, it shows that Augustine's own account of the problems he grappled with in 386 is more accurate than various scholars have wanted to admit.²⁹⁸ In reading the dialogues, I have attempted to shift the focus from doctrinal *minutia* to questions of method. I would wager that scholarly preoccupation with such *minutia* underlies the collective inability to find any definitive

298 See, for instance, Jason BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* (Philadelphia, 2009).

resolution on how to connect *Conf.* to the Cassiciacum works. Augustine clearly did not understand *all* the doctrinal intricacies of Platonist doctrine immediately after choosing to cast his lot with the Platonists, yet I hope to have shown that he nevertheless had command over a methodology, which he himself (with at least some plausibility) claimed to be Platonist, a method which is designed to help individuals in a state of relative ignorance make progress through self-reflective debate.

The bigger contribution of my study to work on *Conf.*, is in this model's ability to draw out the big structure of *Conf.* itself. This first of Augustine's masterpieces presents a divide of Cassiciacum proportions, which is to say one that comes somewhere between two thirds and four fifths of the way through. In *Conf.* this is realized as a shift from autobiographical narrative to an exploration of Scripture's first sentence and the nature of time. This latter set of questions is finally answered by an account of memory, which places time within the soul and not *vice versa*. Now that we have looked into the form and method of the Cassiciacum works, we are in a position to see how it is significant that *Conf.*'s nine books, in which Augustine actively re-imagines his own past, lead to an eventual account of the human mind's power to shape time.

In the broadest of terms, *Conf.* begins with first-order questions of how it was that God led Augustine to Himself in the past. In addressing these questions, Augustine actively engages his rational capacities to think about time, thus showing that the human mind and time are the *kinds of things* that can enter into such a relation. These self-reflective discoveries provide *explananda* which are eventually answered by Augustine's concluding discussion of *memoria*. Along the way there is a shift to second-order questions about the mind and memory. These were introduced somewhat obliquely through a discussion of Genesis 1:1. Yet this shift is not what we

find in *De mus.*, in which first-order questions about poetic meter are simply set aside in the face of second-order questions about the soul. *De ord.* provides the closer model, in which first-order questions give way to second-order questions by way of reformulation and refinement. While Augustine begins *Conf.* by asking about God's actions in the past, progress is made as Augustine, the character, comes to a new understanding not only of God's actions but also of what it means for something to be 'past.' As in *De ord.* and *Sol.*, the soul's approach to its own cause, God, moves through its discovery of itself. The narrative portion of *Conf.* presents Augustine as God's student, while the closing inquiry into time presents Augustine as God's *self-reflective* student. The task we are left with as readers is to fill out the texture of this process, to trace how the numerous dead ends and self-reflective turns advance a single project of un-learning and self-discovery, binding the text into one, as the character of Augustine, and by extension we readers, are prepared to see as *probabile* the final revelation of the soul's divinity and the yet more wonderful divinity of God.

APPENDIX²⁹⁹

Contra Academicos

C. Acad. 1

- First dedication (1.1-4)
- Debate: Arcesilaus' skeptical impasse (1.5-25)
- Summary (1.24-25)

C. Acad. 2

- Second dedication (2.1-9)
- Public history of the Academy (2.11-15)
- Skeptical Academics...
 - adopt Zeno's definition of the cognitive impression (2.11)
 - argue that cognition is impossible (2.11)
 - argue that assent is always irrational (2.11)
 - approve of *probabilia* to carry out practical matters (2.12)
- Narrative of Zeno and Arcesilaus founding the Stoa and skeptical New Academy (2.14)
- Debate: Carneades' skeptical impasse (2.16-30)
- Augustine's argument against Carneades' use of *probabilia* (2.16)
- Academics were prudent men, didn't believe the views they publicly endorsed (2.24)

C. Acad. 3

- Debate (3.1-14)

Oratio perpetua (3.15-45)

- Second-order reflection on first-order debates (3.21-9)
 - "Zeno's definition is true or false" (3.21)
- Certainties pertaining to...
 - physics (3.23-26)
 - ethics (3.27-28)
 - logic (3.29)
- Probabile* conclusion: wisdom can be found; the Sage knows wisdom (3.30)
- Two travelers: practical vs. epistemic error (3.34-36)
 - Academics were prudent, foresaw absurd consequence of their views (3.36)
- Secret history of the Academy (3.37-43)
 - Plato's two-worlds theory (3.37)
 - Impasses used to un-teach and conceal, as preparation for Platonic *mysteria* (3.38)
 - Zeno's materialism spreads through masses
 - Arcesilaus prudently created 'skeptical' impasses out of Zeno's views
 - Carneades draws *veri similia* from the very fonts of Plato (3.39-40)
 - Plotinus brings Platonism back out into open (3.41)
 - Dual weights of authority and reason (3.43)

299 The following *divisiones textus* present what I take to be the major stages in each work's overall argument.

De beata vita

Dedication (1-5)

First Day (6-16)

Opening banter about Trygetius' weight (6-9)

Debate (10-12)

Necessary conditions for happiness (10)

1) having what one wants

2) wanting good things

Conditions satisfied when one has (11)

a) secure things

b) wisdom

c) God

Three accounts of who has God (12)

Anti-skeptical 'dessert' (13-16)

Second day: Debate (17-22)

Adeodatus: he who attends to God, has God (17-18)

Puzzle: the person who seeks God both has and does not have God (19)

Attempts to resolve this puzzle ending in *aporia* (20-22)

Third Day (23-36)

Debate (23-29)

a') The mind that 'has secure things' (23-29)

b') The mind that 'has wisdom' (25-29)

Orata thought-experiment (26-28)

Oratio perpetua (30-35)

Logic of fullness / deficiency / measure (30-33)

As used by Sallust, Cicero and Terence (31-32)

c') Trinitarian account of the mind that 'has God' (solves puzzle from 19)

i) Son = Truth = Wisdom = *modus animi* (34)

ii) Father = *summus modus* (34)

iii) Holy Spirit = *admonitio ad ueritatem* (35)

The right relation to these is necessary & sufficient for happiness (35)

De ordine

Dedication (1.1-5)

Debate (1.6-2.23)

Mis-en-scène (1.6-19)

First puzzle: how are mice and leaves moved by order? (1.11-14)

Second puzzle: is the order of goods and evils itself good? (1.15-19)

Interlude: reflection on activities (1.20-26)

Licentius' move from poetry to philosophy (1.20-21)

Licentius' singing in the outhouse (1.22-23)

Watching a cockfight (1.25-26)

Third puzzle: can things which are with God change? (2.3-7)

Forth puzzle: does the Sage know folly? (2.8-10)

Augustine's little *oratio perpetua*: three models of order (2.12-13)

Unsuccessful attempts to solve problem of evil (2.14-23)

Oratio Perpetua (2.24-54)

order... (2.25-52)

- of life (2.25)

- of instruction (2.26-50)

- authority (2.27)

- reason (2.30-50)

- “*doctissimi viri...*” (2.31)

- rational things (2.31)

- reasonable things (2.32-50)

- in character (see 2.25)

- in liberal disciplines (2.35-50)

- in speaking (2.35-38)

- in delighting (2.39-50)

- for the use of life (2.39-46)

- for contemplation (47-50)

- Abridged curricula (2.47)

- Unity is goal of reasoning; nothing exists without unity (2.48)

- Human vs. non-human builders (2.48-9)

Summary (2.51-52)

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